


ANTHONY
COMSTOCK

RENO



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ANTHONY COMSTOCK

Roundsman of the Lord

*For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall
I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face
like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.*

ISAIAH 50:7 —

ANTHONY COMSTOCK

Roundsman of the Lord

By HEYWOOD BROWN &
MARGARET LEECH

ILLUSTRATED

*'The United States is one great society for the
suppression of vice'—From the District Attorney's
Plea, U.S. vs. D.M. Bennett*

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For
RUTH HALE
WITHOUT WHOM —

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Miss Leech or Mr. Broun's initials appear at the end of each chapter to indicate to the reader the portion of the book written by each.

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ANTHONY COMSTOCK

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CHAPTER I

PORTRAIT OF A CRUSADER

HE was eighteen when he raided a Connecticut saloon and spilled the liquor on the ground. At seventy-one he died as the result of "over-doing in a purity convention." Anthony Comstock led a life of eager adventure.

"It was but the work of a moment to break down these doors, and then get out of the back window, run across the roofs of two houses and into a hotel—"

"As I came forward there were cries of 'Bring him out!' 'Shoot him!' 'Hang the — —!'"

"While he was talking, in most pathetic tones, he plunged his dirk into my face, severing four arteries. . . . Just here everybody asks: Did he get away? Did you shoot him? Neither. My orders were to take that man to jail. . . . I took him to jail."

The quotations, including the dashes which take the place of profanity, are from the works of Mr. Comstock. Somewhat after the manner of James Branch Cabell, Anthony Comstock in his narrative writing is often compelled to draw back from the very edge of some precipice and let it go as "a thing too vile to be mentioned." Occasionally his scruples may seem to some excessive, as when he writes, "Take for instance a well-known book written by Boccaccio (which I do not purpose to advertise by naming). . . ."

But Mr. Comstock knew not only the name of that book, but also its contents. And he with his own eyes had seen other things most strange and unspeakable of which it is best to say nothing. He had to know. Duty commanded it. But was not that a lucky break for Anthony Comstock that almost alone out of all the world he could have his cake and suppress it, too?

But this man was no hypocrite, if hypocrisy is limited to the activities of the conscious mind. Nor is there any readiness here to throw the old crusader to the Freudian lions. In some obscure essay the story is told that Anthony Comstock carried in his pocket a wooden snake which he produced upon occasion to frighten a girl whom he used to visit. The present investigators were not able to locate it. "But you must," insisted an analyst called into consultation. "Don't you see how vitally this sets the pattern for the man's whole life?"

Let it pass and not be set down among the things known of Mr. Comstock, as recorded by himself and others. It is true that he was passionately devoted to his mother and to her memory, that as a lad he trapped animals and shot robins, that he collected postage stamps down to the day of his death, that he was skillful at fine cabinet work, and that he loved the graceful curved lines of Japanese vases and filled his house with these trinkets. And possibly it is not irrelevant to say that Mr. Comstock married the daughter of a Presbyterian elder and that she was ten years older than her husband. Dim she must have been, for one friend who knew her well could remember no more than that she was inveterate in her silence and always dressed in black. Another man who often saw her kept as his only recollection the fact that she weighed eighty-two pounds.

But before any attempt is made, if indeed it ever is, to chart the secret places in the heart of Comstock and explain

the man to himself, let us consider those things about him which were palpable. Charles Gallaudet Trumbull whose semi-official biography, *Anthony Comstock—Fighter*, was published in 1913, says:

Standing about five feet ten in his shoes, he carries his two hundred and ten pounds of muscle and bone so well that you would not judge him to weigh over a hundred and eighty. His Atlas shoulders of enormous breadth and squareness, his chest of prodigious girth, surmounted by a bull-like neck, are in keeping with a biceps and a calf of exceptional size and iron solidarity. His legs are short, and remind one somewhat of tree trunks. . . .

Trumbull does not drape this figure, but since Anthony Comstock was consistent in clothes as in all other matters, the stuff about him can be sketched in as an integral part of the man's appearance. The feet which bore the tree-trunk legs and massive body were large and broad and Mr. Comstock bought his shoes at Coward's. This is not a point to hurry past, for it has been said that it is necessary only to observe how a man is shod if you would know whether or not he regards himself as a romantic person. And the shoes of Anthony Comstock said "No" decidedly. Coward's is the New York store which supplies most of the police and firemen with footwear. The establishment prides itself on serviceable shoes and it is the only store in all the city which keeps size thirteen regularly in stock on its shelves. The clothes of Comstock were dark and not often pressed. In summer he wore a black alpaca coat both in the street and office. The bosoms of his white shirts were stiffly starched, and he tied a black bow around a low winged collar. A man who worked with him for eighteen years could not remember ever seeing Mr. Comstock in colors. His nearest approach to festivity came in the Christmas season when he

put aside the black bow for a white one. The Puritan strong boy tried to be more gay for the holidays. In his diary for the year 1873, he has recorded, "For Christmas I received a pair of slippers, a mustache cup and saucer and a gold tooth-pick."

Possibly the most famous feature of Mr. Comstock's appearance was his whiskers, so eagerly seized upon by caricaturists for half a century. In his early fighting days they were ginger-colored, and it must have been during this period that a *Sun* reporter referred to them as "gamboge mutton chops." Later they were white as the plume of Navarre and a distinct handicap to the roundsman of the Lord, for Comstock liked to make arrests in person and sometimes he lost his man because he was not one whom the ferret-eyed could fail to detect as he approached. Once he wore a handkerchief mask-like across his face in stalking down a street pedlar, but it is not known that he ever assumed any other disguises. Possibly the whiskers indicate an unsuspected sensitivity about his personal appearance in the heart of Anthony Comstock. They were an honorable badge of his calling and served in part to conceal the long vivid scar which marked the course of the dirk with which Conroy cut him. Still, it is not to be denied that he did wear red flannel underwear all the year round.

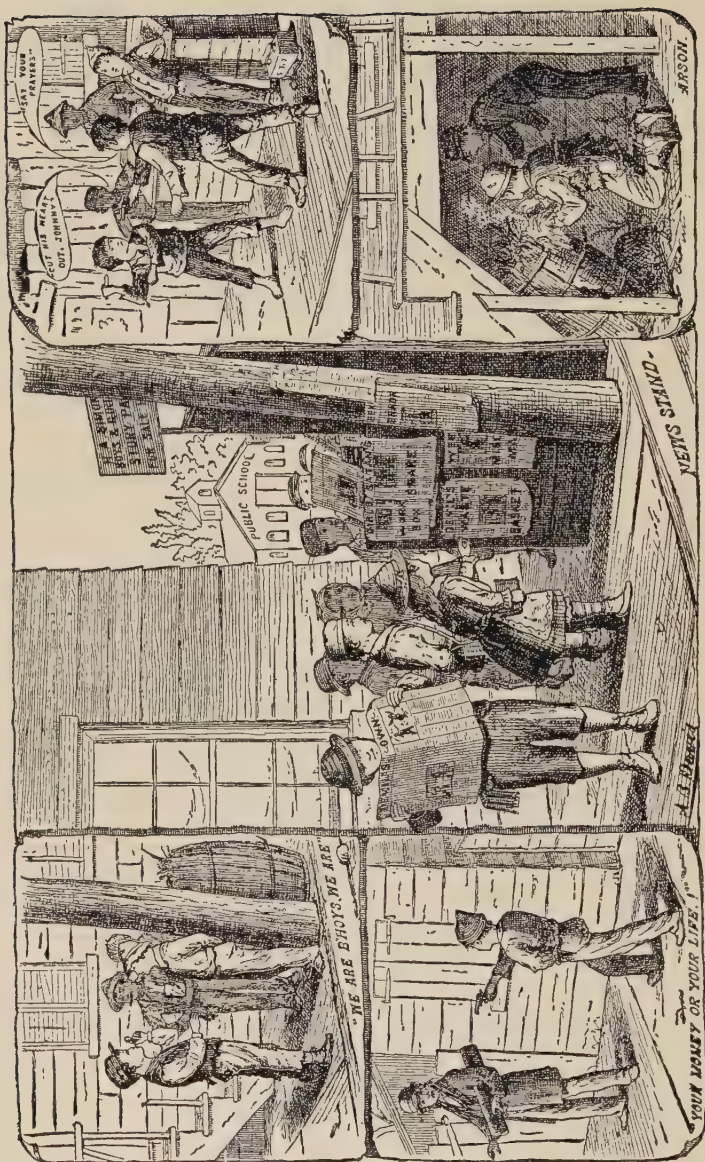
The forehead was high, and baldness came early. The eyes, blue and truculent. And he was truculent and gave ground to no man. Always a certain tension was on him. When he felt anything intensely—this would cover practically all of Mr. Comstock's emotions—he had a trick of drawing down his upper lip as he spoke, and this gave his face an expression of deep and passionate earnestness. That was a fitting aspect. To examine closely into the life of Comstock is to be convinced of both his passion and his



From "Life," March 1, 1888. This weekly in cartoons and quips consistently opposed Comstock's activities. In this drawing, Father Time, fully and modestly clad, is shown crowning Comstock with a fool's cap.



From "Life," January 12, 1888. Under the heading, "That Fertile Imagination," Comstock is shown arresting an artist for depicting a woman almost totally submerged. "Don't you suppose I can imagine what is under the water?" is Anthony's explanation.



THE MODERN NEWS STAND AND ITS RESULTS.

After the menace of obscenity, Comstock was convinced that stories of crime and adventure ranked as dangerous foes to youthful morality. This picture is the frontispiece to the reformer's book, "Traps for the Young."

earnestness. In the little leather diary which he kept during the year 1871 he wrote:

As for me I am resolved that I will not in God's strength yeild to other people's opinion but will if I feel and believe I am right stand firm. Jesus was never moved from the path of duty, however hard, by public opinion. Why should I be.

And when the old stamp collector set down his heavy soled boots and braced the tree-like legs he was firm and few dislodged him. Dead, he has not utterly been shoved aside. He represented a solid and important block of public opinion in the United States, and exerted a considerable influence on American thought. He was one who led by repulsion as well as attraction. Those who hated him were no less shaped by his career than the many who respected his principles. It may be that he stood like a granite rock in the path of American art and literature. Certainly he sought to stymie the realists. Those who came through to the other side should pray in thankfulness to the fierce old prude who tried to set his heavy shoulders in the way of much truth and most beauty. But for the menace of Comstock they might never have learned to climb and blast and tunnel. In making the arts dangerous, he made them glamorous.

In strict justice to Anthony Comstock it must be said that his actual interference with books, plays and paintings of sincere intent was slight. The scope of his censorship has grown vastly in the telling. That was inevitable. Long before his death Comstock was transformed into a symbol. Indeed it was by this process that he became a figure of national importance. In an interview which he gave to Nixola Greeley-Smith of the New York *Evening World* in 1913, two years before his death, Comstock said:

In the forty-one years I have been here I have convicted persons enough to fill a passenger train of sixty-one coaches,

sixty coaches containing sixty passengers each and the sixty-first almost full. I have destroyed 160 tons of obscene literature.

Anthony Comstock thought of the critical approach as a process of smelling and weighing. So strong were some of the trails which he followed that he happened only infrequently upon important books. Some of the volumes which went to make up the one hundred and sixty ton total were: *Only a Boy*; *The Lustful Turk*; *Kate Percival*, *The Belle of the Delaware*; *The Lascivious London Beauty*; *Peep Behind the Curtains of a Female Seminary*; *Fanny Hill*; *Love on the Sly*; *Amorous Sketch Book*; *Voluptuous Confessions*; *Beautiful Creole of Havana*; *A Night in a Moorish Harem*; *Curtain Drawn Up, Or the Education of Laura*; *Flash and Frisky Song Book*; *Madame Celestine*; *Isabel Manton*, *The Beautiful Courtesan*.

Now these books, with the exception of *Fanny Hill*, are not held to have literary merit, and it is questionable if *Fanny Hill* should be listed among the valuable classics of the language. To be sure the point can be made, and is being made increasingly, that even downright pornography is harmful only in so far as it is made to seem important by suppression. Whether true or false, this theory is still a minority opinion; and it seems fair to say that in his own day the bulk of Comstock's work might well be classed as a defense of the folkways of his people. Even in his occasional excesses Mr. Comstock may have served a useful function in acting as a brake to slow down the pace at which the new freedom approached, so that it should not burst suddenly upon a community too shockable to afford hospitality to frankness.

Or, perhaps, he played the rôle of King Canute, a man scorned through the ages most unjustly. Of the usefulness

of this king there can be no question. He deserves a place among those honored as martyrs to science. The more flexible-minded might never have noted a turn in the tide but for the spectacle of this man who constituted himself a fixed post. He endured wet feet to the end that others might, by virtue of his example, comfortably give ground and adapt themselves to the rising salty currents.

Again, in the matter of pictures, few among the half-million pounced upon by Comstock were reproductions of well-known or worthy pictures. It is true that often he held simple and sometimes beautiful nudes to be contraband, but most of the stuff he seized was more complicated and less pleasant. In the Greeley-Smith interview, Anthony Comstock explained his state of mind toward the nude in some detail:

Anything which tends to destroy the dignity of womanhood or to display the female form in an irreverent manner is immoral [he said]. No one reveres the female form more than I do. In my opinion there is nothing else in the world so beautiful as the form of a beautiful maiden woman—nothing. But the place for a woman's body to be—denuded—is in the privacy of her own apartments with the blinds down.

Whether the male body was also to be considered a matter for reverence, Mr. Comstock did not say, and apparently he established no rules as to just where it should be denuded. However, he did make arrests on the basis of pictures which showed male nudes, and once confiscated a pamphlet of the Art Students' League because it contained reproductions of student sketches made in the life classes.

The bulk of the more flagrantly foolish things done by the great vice-crusader came in the later years of his career. Unlike Canute he did not draw back as the tide rose, but

instead charged forward and got beyond his depth. His was one of the first voices raised in this country against Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, although he did not actually appear in court as the complainant. During that controversy, Comstock tried to dismiss Shaw as "this Irish smut dealer." Although a mentor of public morals, he cannot be said to have been well informed on the drama, even though he often touched upon it in his speeches. A close associate of Comstock says that the old man went to the theater only twice during the eighteen years in which he knew him. Once he went to a vaudeville show to investigate a complaint that one of the dances was obscene; on the single occasion when he fared forth for pleasure he chose David Warfield in *The Music Master*. There he found no cause for complaint in plot or interpretation, but his venture was not altogether happy. He fought with a neighbor in the audience who wanted Mrs. Comstock to take her hat off.

Although a Christian less devout than Comstock, Shaw returned good for evil to his adversary. It was Shaw who conferred on the Connecticut farmer boy his best chance for immortality. He took the very proper name of the vice-crusader and changed it into a common noun. And to this day you will find that essayists and editorial writers use the word "comstockery." Maybe the old man is not enshrined in the hearts of his countrymen, but he lives in their language.

And this is most extraordinary, for there was little about young Comstock, or middle-aged Comstock either, to suggest that he should one day be famous. He neither spoke nor wrote with conspicuous skill and he was a man of scanty education. The Civil War took him out of high school, and he had no opportunity to study later. Perhaps spelling

is not an altogether fair test of any one's intellectual fitness. Still anybody who has thumbed the Comstock diaries can hardly fail to be impressed with the word "yeild." Possibly this was a Freudian repugnance, and he messed the vowels about because this was a word for which he had no sympathy. Still that explanation will not serve for the constantly recurring "hard tact" (a biscuit served in the army), nor for "gass," "oppertunity," "riged inspection," "pslam" and "skermishing."

Yet other Puritans, with even less traditional schooling, have made themselves powerful and important. The wonder of Comstock's life is wider than that. What Puritan between Cromwell and Comstock ever had an exciting time almost every step of the hard climb up the straight and narrow path to the gates of Heaven? Even Anthony himself was not wholly unaware of the fact that the duty which devolved upon him had many elements of entertainment. He was fond of saying that for forty years he was "stationed in a swamp at the mouth of a sewer." And generally he would add that he shared the post with "rattlesnakes and other poisonous dangers." But this was his final estimate: "I have more joy in the service of my Master at the point where he has assigned me than I could get anywhere outside that narrow little place."

Indeed there is ground for the fantastic suspicion that, if one looks along the golden bar of Heaven, tomorrow or any day throughout eternity, he will see an Atlas-like figure somewhat beyond that spot which the Blessed Damozel has picked for pining. And this other also leans out and sighs. His broad back is turned upon the jasper spires of the city of the blessed dead. These are the pure in heart. Anthony Comstock, fighter, can find nothing here to which he may turn his hand. And within him is an itch to be up

and doing—and just once more lead a foray against the evil men with books and picture postcards.

After all, in that mighty train which he peopled with his captives, he never did quite fill that sixty-first car.

H. B.

CHAPTER II

COMSTOCK AND THE FREUDIAN LIONS

FEW biographies are written by neutrals. Hate will do in a pinch, but these chroniclers feel that they have never achieved the capacity of a hot and steady flame. Accordingly, they will admit that in the beginning they consciously set themselves the task of trying to drum up a liking for some phase of the character of Anthony Comstock. To their great surprise an admiration for the man came suddenly and without effort.

A young man on the *New York World*, when told of this projected biography, exclaimed, "Why do you want to write a book to blast that old idiot?"

"And for what reason," asked the collaborators coldly, "do you assume that we are set on attacking him?"

"Do rattlesnakes bite?" replied the young man rudely, and let it go at that.

But there is a quality which disarms even the venomous. That quality is wistfulness. Comstock had it. Not gross nuggets as in an Irish poet, but the vein is there. In the great army of reformers he stands forth as naïve beyond all others. His religion is that of Paul, but on occasion and wholly without intent he robs Paul to play Peter Pan. At any rate, Anthony Comstock did not grow up. The Devil for instance is an adolescent concept. When Comstock spoke of the Devil, a character much on his mind, he did not mean a principle of evil or any mere symbol of sinfulness, but an actual person, red, with horns, a tail and a practical pitchfork.

"Of course, you know," explained our Freudian adviser, "that the Devil is a phallic symbol."

"Tell us what isn't. That would be simpler," replied one skeptic author. There was impatience with the Freudian from time to time because he made the task too simple and also too difficult.

I believe [wrote Anthony Comstock in *Traps for the Young*] that there is a devil. Those who disagree with me in this may translate my language. All I ask is that they admit the vital truth on which I insist. Let my language be considered symbolical, provided that the evils I denounce are regarded as diabolical.

Symbolism was just a sop. To read the unpublished works of Anthony Comstock is to be convinced that he himself did not truly intend his Devil to be taken as a force which makes for unrighteousness or anything so shadowy. And let no argument be based on the fact that Comstock calls him "devil" and keeps him lower case. It will be observed later in extracts from his diaries that Anthony capitalized largely out of emotion. For instance he usually referred to Sunday as "a Hallowed Day." One of his bitterest complaints against Robert Ingersoll was that this infidel wrote of "God and his angels" rather than "God and His Angels." In withholding a large D from the devil, Comstock had no intention of denying him actuality. He merely refused him honor. Southerners write the word "negro" though well aware that names of races are capitalized. Comstock roared loudly at Ingersoll who would take away his God. And he liked little better those who would deprive him of his Devil.

One of the chief factors in the wistfulness of Anthony Comstock resides in the nature of his religious convictions. The Puritan in his world is lonely. Between him and the Creator there has been set a gulf. No priest nor pope nor

Virgin intervenes. All of his problems he must take directly to his God, and God is a jealous God and busy. Comstock prayed every night of his life and subjected his soul to constant scrutiny. And yet, though his faith was mighty, he could not wholly free himself from a conviction of sin. There were times when the face of God was turned from him. "O God, how long must I be thus straying and sinning," he wrote in his Civil War diary.

To be sure, he need not have been so lonely in the long hours. One supernatural being was always within call. Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays that swift courier, the Devil. Throughout his "armed life" Anthony Comstock fought him, assailed him rudely and obtained judicial decisions against him. He would have described his feeling toward Old Nick as one of utter loathing, and in this he might have done an injustice to himself and to the Devil. You cannot fight with any adversary over so long a period without coming to have for him a sneaking liking. Or at least a close personal interest. There was Fuzzy Wuzzy who broke the British square and pushed on into the poems of Kipling. Or to take a later instance, Johnny Dundee and Benny Leonard boxed ten times and then spectators said, "These men fight so often they must be friends."

But nobody ever charged that Comstock and the Devil gave anything but their best in their continual fierce encounters. Anthony should have appreciated how much the Devil did to make what might have been a drab life full and spirited. It was the Devil who gave the career of Comstock a meaning and a purpose. We should like to think that, when the bell rang for the last round, these two veteran and competent contenders at least shook hands before they stood toe to toe and slugged their hardest.

Anthony Comstock, fighter, carried on some of his fiercest

struggles within the confines of his own conscience. Harvey O'Higgins and E. H. Reede wrote in *The American Mind in Action*:

The Puritan hated the Flesh in himself and he hated even more fiercely that Flesh appearing as the vices of others. . . . It is useless to tell such a man to love his neighbor as himself; he hates so much of himself. His hate, reservoird within him, gets its drainage in raids on vice, in the persecutions and suppressions carried on by anti-vice societies and in campaigns of reform that call for the punishment of evil-doers.

Although Freud was undoubtedly among the great ones of whom Comstock never heard he was not at all unaware that he fought people who brought temptation into the world because he himself was greatly tempted.

Trumbull writes:

While the boy's childhood days were chiefly filled with the things that make for good, yet there were vicious characters in school and on the farm, — some of the hired help being abundantly so, which was a great sorrow to the mother. Mr. Comstock bears testimony to the common experience of many when he says that certain things that were brought into his life in those boyhood days started memories and lines of temptation that are harder for him to overcome than anything that ever came into his life in later years.

And temptations did keep coming, even after Comstock turned the corner out of boyhood. Most of the battles recorded in his Civil War diary are references to struggles with the Devil. The Rebels were much easier to manage. But it is well to remember that the young Congregationalist's conception of sin must have covered wide territory.

"Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." It is Scripture, and Comstock was a Fundamentalist. Indeed, it

is possible that out of all the Bible this was the doctrine which he took most to heart, for the crusade of his life was mainly directed against sins of thought rather than sins of action. He pursued the pornographer and not the prostitute.

“ . . . and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.” To the mind of Comstock this would be the heaviest sin of David.

It must be remembered that a creature to seduce the soul need not be a woman actually of flesh and blood. From such contacts young Comstock was comparatively safe when he stood picket duty for the Seventeenth Connecticut Volunteers in the lonely swamps of Folly Island. But what power could protect the solitary outpost from being flanked by the phantoms of the Devil? Out of the marsh itself could rise mirages, and it was useless to cry out, “Who goes there?” Comstock knew these shadow shapes to be projections of his own brute nature. It was not until many years later that he learned to shut such longing into his beloved, small, round vases of Japan, even as the wise men of Arabia sealed genii into jars.

Look into the diary of 1864:

Feb. 15—My heart has been sad today on acct. of the wandering of thoughts and sinfulness of head. Told lie today in an unexpected moment but trust God has pardoned for Jesus sake.

Feb. 18—My mind has been rather sad today. Thoughts seem to wander away from the centre which all our thoughts should unite.

Feb. 20—Was rather sad and despondent untill I read portion of the Scripture which relieved my Mind. How wonderful is God's grace. How soothing to the troubled heart!

Feb. 27—Today has been rather a sad day to my heart. O that I could overcome sin. O God how long must I be thus straying [here Comstock wrote "helpless," but thought better of that and scratched it out] and sinning. O wilt thou keep me from sin. O make me pure.

Feb. 28—No place to attend church or worship God except in our tents. Would gladly go without eating Sundays if we might have a Chaplin and Sunday worship. Today has been another sad day to me on acct. of my own sinfulness.

At this point the consulting Freudian interrupted the reading of the Comstock diary to say, "Don't you see this urge to sin which afflicts him comes at almost regular intervals? It's like a tide. Of course all these sins of which he speaks so vaguely were sins against purity."

But when the Freudian was silenced, the rest of the entry concerning the sinfulness of Anthony Comstock on February 28, 1864, was added to the record and the point raised by the scientist was marred. This time Anthony was specific as to the nature of his evil-doing, for he wrote, "This morning spoke harsh words to the cook and vexed him. Should have kept nearer to Jesus."

Still it seems fair to assume that not all the sins which weighed so heavily on the soul of the young recruit consisted of being rude to cooks. He was engaged in his own private Civil War, a war which never came to any Appomattox. In his country's struggle he enlisted, but Anthony Comstock was a conscript in the enduring fight between Flesh and Spirit. To many who crossed his path, or, to put it more accurately, who found him crossing theirs, Comstock seemed arrogant and overbearing. But this was the intolerance of the oppressed, not of the oppressor. The Great Mogul of American morals fought all his days a rearguard action in a retreating army. His was a lost

cause. He dedicated himself to the proposition that this might be a world liberated, not only from evil deeds, but also evil thoughts. The livid welt upon his cheek was not the only scar he carried out of the fight to enforce the impossible.

He must have known that he could not wall out from his own mind all erotic fancies, and so he turned all the more fiercely upon the ribaldry of others. It does not seem an altogether foolish course. Not the least courageous person in the civilized and inhibited world is the man who manages so to trample down intolerable instincts that his repressions come to be a close-packed parapet on which he may stand and shout defiance. The casualties of the Great War between Flesh and Spirit are many and neurotic. And some, the greater number, take to their beds—which need not be a metaphor. A flaming few do otherwise. Here and there is one of the afflicted who takes up his bed and walks. This was the way of Comstock. He belonged to the noble army of fanatics.

He knew nothing of the possibility of escape through books, pictures, plays and music. The first chapter of his book, *Traps for the Young*, which is devoted to Satan's snares for children, concerns "Half-Dime Novels and Story Papers." Novels selling for more than half a dime did not seem to him much better.

In novel reading [he wrote], the general tendency is from the higher to the lower, rather than from the lower to the higher. There are grave questions in the minds of some of our best writers, and of our most thoughtful men and women, whether novel reading at its best does not tend downward rather than upward. Some have questioned whether persons reading such authors as Mrs. Southworth and Alexander Dumas advance in time to George Eliot and Sir Walter Scott.

And Comstock, you may be sure, was among those who questioned.

"I don't care that," Trumbull quotes him as saying—and adds the descriptive business 'with a contemptuous snap of his finger'—"for your blood and thunder stories. But I do enjoy the story of any man or woman, boy or girl, who sacrifices himself for principle."

"All sacrifice and no sadism makes Jack an inhibited boy, as the saying goes," broke in the consulting Freudian at this point. "Evidently your friend Mr. Comstock got no drainage out of literature. How about the theater? Wasn't that any use to him?"

Not much, apparently. In his 1873 diary he wrote on April 10:

In the evening we went to Barnum's at Rink, 65th and 3rd ave. We saw a fine collection of Animals, Birds etc. The trained horses were very fine indeed, and were it not for some three or four half naked women it would have been unobjectionable. Why is it that every public play must have a naked woman? It is disgusting; and pernicious to the young. It seems as though we were living in an age of lust. Every play nowadays cannot succeed, or does succeed in proportion to the extent to which they cater to the passions and lusts.

"But," inquired the Freudian again, "your Mr. Comstock was not altogether a meek man, was he, in spite of his frequent reference to Jesus and to sacrifice?"

He was not. Quite often he permitted himself extremely healthful bursts of righteous anger. Here is an entry for August 8, 1873:

All went to Roton Point. Had a jolly good time. Went in Bathing, then had dinner in the grove. After which we returned Home, stopping for Ice Cream. As the Ladies were getting out of Waggon, two sailor-dressed young men rolled over on the grass near our Wagon and were engaged looking

up under the ladies' Clothes as they dismounted. I saw what their game was and gave them a "quiet kick in their stomachs" that cured them.

Sport is an activity in which many find an effective outlet for humanity's normal desire to be up and doing something to somebody else. Comstock was fond of hunting and shot many squirrels, chipmunks and rabbits in his boyhood. He was also a trapper.

When I was a boy [he explains in a chapter on Free Love—Comstock was against it]—I used to construct in the woods what was called a stonetrap. This was formed by taking a large flat stone and setting it up on one edge at an angle of about forty-five degrees, and fastening it there by means of three notched sticks. The end of one directly under the center of the stone was baited with a sweet apple. The rabbit or squirrel nibbling the apple would spring the trap and be crushed to death.

In mature life Comstock had no time for this engaging pastime, nor for hunting either. In his army days he played ball for exercise. But there is only one reference to subsequent participation in athletics. On May 30, 1871, he wrote:

Lottie and I went to Freehold. Were disappointed. Everybody seemed cross and I in the bargain. All got excited playing Croquet. I insisted on fair play and some thought different.

Music does not seem to have touched Comstock's life. There are no references to it except occasional mention of a hymn. He is more concerned and interested in the sermons which he heard in his constant church-going. Once Comstock bought a painting and this was a great surprise to his associate who accompanied him to the auction. The

theme of the picture is lost to the memory of the man who marvelled at the incident.

"Why did you buy that picture, Mr. Comstock?" he asked, after the purchaser had handed over five dollars and taken possession of the canvas.

"I want to re-gild the frame, Charlie," answered the old connoisseur.

And Anthony was nobody's fool in that deal. A year or two later a visitor in his house at Summit, New Jersey, told him, "You have a very fine painting there, Mr. Comstock."

Next day he carried it into town to the Macbeth Galleries, and sold his old master for \$400. It may be that Anthony Comstock had an instinctive, though untutored, appreciation of art.

Although the beleaguered defender of purity found no escape from the tight rein of righteousness in any of the arts, there is some evidence that he did permit himself release through the device of fantasy. At any rate, the consulting Freudian found the following diary entry (1873) of great significance:

Took the 6.12 A.M. train at Manchester for New York. A young lady, Miss Miller, of Philadelphia, came down with me. She occupied a seat with me and I treated her as I would like to have my wife or sister treated. She went to her uncle's, 36 West 18th street. She seemed a very simple-minded, pure, sweet girl and I was glad that she had no villain to deal with. How can men be so base and low as to impose upon the young and pure?

It is the notion of the Freudian that Mr. Comstock did allow his mind to dwell with some pleasure upon the speculation, "Now what would happen if I were indeed a villain?"

This was announced as a chapter in which evidence would be brought forward to show that one might readily take a



The diary which Anthony Comstock kept in 1864 was prefaced by an appeal that the little book should be sent to his brother in the event of his death. The photograph shows young Comstock at this period of his life.

Should I fall on the Battlefield;
^{or} ~~from~~ the Hospital; for the sake of
 humanity, I beg whoever shall find
 this little Diary, to send it home
 to my brother, Chester Comstock
 New Canaan. New Canaan
 Conn. Conn.

FRIDAY, JULY 8, 1864.

Stood on post, 9 hrs. last night, and off 10; but could not sleep on account of Mosquitoes. Seemed as though should be devoured, though tied up head with Mosquito bar net. Would bite through pants, and socks. Could take no fence at all. Saw scorpion to day, on one of Wags Rubbers. 75¢ boys killed a Stear and gave us 14 of it. also some of liver. Had a thunder shower; ground was almost flooded. Had very sweet thoughts of friends, home, and heaven. May we all meet at last in that blessed place.

SATURDAY 9.

On post to same as yesterday, except were relieved this evening. Could not sleep tonight, nor during day; for Mosquitoes I might take from me all peace of sleep, and as warm by day. Face burned to a blister almost. Alice Price came in to St. A. but brought no mail. Arrived in Barracks about dark. Had supper of fresh beef & Coffee & Bread. So late to attend Br. Meeting. How I have missed them this week. How precious are they. My soul, humbled for the light, and love of Gods Creator. So ~~precious~~ ^{SUNDAY} Great work, no doubt. Were detailed for guard this morning.

but for our eyes were burned by sun so bad that could exercise. Did not go to Church in afternoon. In evening had a very precious meeting, indeed. Brother, Geo. Leys. in charge. Warmed up my soul very much. How precious was Jesus to my soul. 6 or 7 of us had prayer meeting by Buck bed of Barracks, afterwards. Before meeting, visited hospital to see Steward Strader, of 15th Wis. Was quite weak. Was sleeping did not speak with ~~him~~.

fancy to Anthony Comstock. So far, not much progress has been made in that direction. There is, however, much to be said of him as an honest man, a courageous man, and in a few fine instances a person of simple, eloquent dignity. There is in him, too, a quality of pathos. His Civil War diary holds much of this. There, scratched in the back of the rusty leather notebook, is the item, "Places to visit in Philadelphia—Navy Yard. State House. West Philadelphia Hospital from 12 to 6 o'clock. Gass works."

Picture this twenty-year-old recruit from a Connecticut farm coming up to Philadelphia on leave from the front, and spending his merry week-end at the West Philadelphia Hospital and the "Gass works."

This record of his year of service was never a journal meant for publication. Although permission to read the book was accorded to these collaborators by its present rightful owner, they have been conscious of some guilt of trespass; for on the fly-leaf sixty-two years ago young Comstock scrawled his name and regiment and under that, "No Man's business but my own." We might not have gone on, but we remembered that he did not precisely make that motto a working rule of life all through his own career. The 1871 diary which contains his account of his wedding and honeymoon is still more terrifying, for in this the warning has been amplified as follows:

To anyone finding this book out of my possession. It contains nobodies business but my own. And no one should meddle or read therein unless *I* invite them so to do. And then should go no farther.

Anthony Comstock enlisted in the Union army to take the place of his older brother, Samuel, who was killed at Gettysburg. Samuel was in charge of a commissary train just before the high tide of the Confederacy was broken.

On the eve of the battle he insisted upon being put in a more dangerous post and was accordingly transferred to a combat unit. In the first day's fighting he was desperately wounded at Barlow's Knoll. For weeks he lingered in a field hospital and when he died one of his soldier comrades wrote back to the Comstocks in Connecticut that Samuel had whispered to him in his last conscious moments a scrap from an old and familiar hymn:

*Jesus can make a dying bed
Feel soft as downy pillows are.*

Anthony felt that his enlistment was a consecration not only to the cause of the Union, but to his dead brother's memory. He had a romantic feeling of joining the noble army of martyrs in the days before he came in contact with the actual surfaces of camp life.

Should I fall on the Battlefield, or die in the Hospital [he wrote in his little black book], for the sake of humanity, I beg whoever shall find this little Diary to send it home to my brother, Chester Comstock, New Canaan, Conn.

And the first entry of December 31, 1863, has in it the flourish suitable to one about to embark upon a holy cause.

Today I volunteered myself as one to go and assist in subduing this accursed Rebellion. I go trusting wholly in God for strength and deliverance. How thankful I am that I have not only an opportunity of serving my Country, but also my dear friends at home. I rejoice that I have such an opportunity of providing entirely for the little ones at home¹ and give Chet (noble brother) a chance of starting for himself.

¹This is a reference to the bounty which was paid to him for his enlistment.

This was the dream of the young crusader. His first brush with the reality of barrack life was comic or tragic, just as you please.

Jan 8, 1864—Arrived in camp at Ft. Trumbull about 2 o'clock: as we entered the Barracks a feeling of sadness came over me and it seems as though I should sink when I heard the air resounding with the oaths of wicked men. My heart failed me nearly untill I bethought me of a present that *dear* Mrs Betts (Hymns of the Church Militant) gave me: when I drew it from my sachel: and it seemed as though it opened of its own accord to the 278 page to the Hymn entitled "Waiting," and as I read it such a light and relief came over me that I felt resigned to all of my trials: and now my humble prayer shall be: May thy Will O God be done. O how much we need the arm of God to comfort and sustain us. As we were coming over, 3 out of the 7 that accompanied me Pledged themselves to me that they would not swear, drink nor chew tobacco while we were in the army (for 3 yrs). O keep us all from wandering away from Thee, O Our Heavenly Father. O *Bless* all kind friends at home, and make them thy friends for Jesus sake.

That the Connecticut farmer boy was somewhat green and not yet familiar with army discipline may be judged from the entry in his diary for January 10—a Sunday.

Expected to have a quiet time today: but was disappointed: for at seven o'clk was called out for inspection call: then at nine all of us were called out for clothes which took untill noon: when I was called up to the Capt. office to write for the Captain. At any other time I could not have consented to work on God's Hallowed day. But longing to be away from the Den of cursing and Blasphemy (the Barracks) I set me down to write: and spent the remainder of the day and night untill eleven o'clk writing. The Boys spent a portion of the day in reading the Bible. I am so glad that they go to that Blessed Book for comfort in their hour of trial and temptation.

"The Boys," of course, refers not to all his comrades, but to the little group which had joined with him in the pledge to refrain from profanity, chewing-tobacco and alcohol. The full tragedy of army life did not break upon young Comstock until the next day. He had gone to the Captain's office and worked on the Sabbath because he felt that in the room of an officer he would be safe from the low talk to which the enlisted men were addicted. On Monday it became Anthony's painful duty to record in his little book:

Spent the whole of the day in writing. . . . Was much Grieved to hear the Capt Swear in the office: would that I could find one place here where no swearing could be heard.

"Put not your trust in princes." Now he had to add, "And captains of the line." Later others were included. Never did Comstock find comfort in authority. There was only God and not any middleman. In maturity even his associates found him contentious, not patient in accepting counsel and determined to make all decisions without aid. Why not? Whom could he trust? Salvation is wholly personal, and Comstock journeyed toward redemption with no companion whatsoever except a voice called conscience. And conscience was no man's business but his own, and also God's, of course. Here within himself Anthony Comstock found the court of first and last resort.

Arrogant? Oh yes indeed, but what is arrogance but the whistling of those who walk beside a precipice which falls away down to eternal flames? At the peak arrogance takes on a tone not at all unlike the sounds we generally associate with humility, simplicity and reticence. On October 31, 1874, after Comstock had been severely wounded by Conroy, he came back to the office with his face muffled in

bandages and wrote an account of the affair in the blotter. "At jail door attempted to kill C. by stabbing him in the head. Failed and was locked up." But the blotter records no more arrests that year.

H. B.

CHAPTER III

BOYHOOD AND A WINTRY FAITH

HE was born in New Canaan, Connecticut, in 1844, on the seventh of March, and it may be that both the month and the countryside contributed to the cleavage of personality which made Anthony Comstock a man at war with himself, as well as with the community in which he spent his fighting years. March is alternately lion and lamb, and the Connecticut sector of New England swings each year from black winter desolation to a summer almost garish in its nodding show of pink and white and purple.

The farmhouse where Polly Lockwood Comstock had her child was unpainted. This must have been the choice and not the necessity of Thomas Anthony Comstock, the father of the boy, for he was then a man of some substance. His farm fell away from the plain square cottage, and no one standing under the maples and elms in the dooryard could see its farthest boundaries. One hundred and sixty acres is affluence in New England, and besides Thomas Comstock was the owner of two sawmills. In the height of the season, he employed thirty hands. This was in addition to a small force of conscripts, for Polly was the mother of ten children, and seven lived into maturity.

Both Polly and Thomas were Puritan by direct descent. They came of long-lived folk, deep-rooted in the soil of their native state. But Polly broke one tradition of her people, for she died when Anthony was ten years old. Though she was not an old woman, her purposes in life had been completed. Ten she bore and upon all those

who lived Polly set her imprint and perpetuated herself. They had the name of Comstock but the look of Lockwoods.

She was the strength of the house. Thomas did not do so well after her death and the home was broken. Anthony never spoke of his father save with respect, but his love went to his mother. When she had been dead for more than fifty years, he told an interviewer that the whole purpose of his life had been to honor the memory of Polly Lockwood Comstock. Before he was ten he had met the ideal woman, and when he married he chose one who seemed not unlike her.

Religion was the most important influence in the life of Comstock and this was directly associated with the memory of his mother. She told him Bible stories during the year or so when he was still too young to attend church with the regularity which came later. Maybe a few of the tales came from other sources, but Comstock assured his biographer, Trumbull, that they were all "stories of moral heroism."

The opportunity to join in public worship was not long denied to the little boy and religion came into his life with a rush and roar, filling it as a great wind puffs out a sapling.

His father would hitch up a four-seated wagon Sunday mornings, fill it with family and farm hands, and drive the two and a half miles to church. In winter it was no uncommon matter to have to take along shovels to clear away the snow-drifts. Sunday-school was held immediately after the morning preaching service, in the gallery of the church; then lunch was eaten in the horse-sheds. About the time lunch was finished the bell would ring for afternoon preaching service; then followed the drive home. . . . In the evenings some would frequently go back to the closing church service of the day, returning to be refreshed with pie and milk. Daily prayers were conducted every morning, before breakfast, and

the hired men and servants, as well as the family, were expected to be present.

These services of which Trumbull tells were largely made up of prayer and preaching. The Congregational church which the Comstocks attended made no effort to mingle religion and æsthetics. A jealous God was not likely to be interested in any pageantry of miserable sinners. Anthony himself would have been gravely shocked at the notion of attempting to glorify God with bright colors and fragrance. Indeed he was thus shocked in early adult life, for on Christmas Eve while serving in the Union Army in Florida he made the mistake of wandering into a Roman Catholic church to see what the midnight mass would be like. Comstock's purpose was purely educational. He had already attended service at the colored "Babtist" church. He did not stay long with the Catholics, but hurried home to write in his diary, "Went to Midnight mass in Catholic Church. Soon became disgusted. Do not think it right to spend Sunday morn. in such manner. Seemed much like Theater."

And so it may well be that it was easier to shovel through the snow-drifts on the way to the grim little church near New Canaan than to drive to prayer and preaching on bright mornings of New England summer. On such days the birds, some of them red as cardinals, would pipe and sing like choir boys, and lilac and mock orange filled the air with perfume more pungent than any incense. And all this on a Sunday!

It was a wintry faith in which Anthony Comstock was nurtured. The threat of hellfire crackled within, and outside was the bitter wind. Four times every Sabbath, Anthony Comstock, or Tony as the little boy was called, heard the dread tale of damnation 'before he returned home to eat his pie and milk and sleep upon the promise of a searing fire which should be everlasting. Perhaps with

brain and belly crammed he sometimes dreamt and cried out in the night for Polly. Whether or not she came to him it would be hard to say, for like God she had many children.

In later life Anthony Comstock spoke very often of the comforts and consolations of religion. There can be no doubt that from it he derived an ecstasy, but that is not precisely of a piece with comfort. He could write, when he was nineteen:

One of the sweetest days of my life, so near to Jesus. The grave seemed but a dark receptacle for rubbish where to through this worthless frame or body at death, while all above it was radiant with purest light. Were it not for the Loved ones of earth mourning and were I sure they would all meet me Home, I would with joy welcome the tomb. O why do I feel thus. Not myself, not a whit, but all, all in Christ. His grace shed abroad in my heart. O to praise him with a pure heart in Spirit and Truth.

Even in this exaltation he is, you see, not wholly free from worry. The Devil abhors a vacuum and there must be souls for Hell. Comstock cannot escape the thought that some of these may be chosen from his own dear ones, brother, sister, father. But there came even blacker days when the flames licked up toward his own ankles. Within a month of this sweet day there was another at the end of which young Comstock wrote:

I debased myself in my own eyes today by my own weakness and sinfulness, was strongly tempted today, and oh! I yearned instead of fleeing to the "fountain" of all my strength. What sufferings I have undergone since, no one knows. Attended pr. meeting yet found no relief; instead each prayer or Hymn seemed to add to my misery.

These fierce conflicts Comstock seems to have succeeded in forgetting in later life, for when he talked of his boy-

hood to Trumbull little mention was made of any forays which the Devil made against one raised to be God-fearing. He did confess, though almost facetiously, to a single drinking bout. Trumbull treats it lightly and modestly. We are told:

One of his duties was to drive the cows home from pasture every night. On the way lived a certain boy whose house he was forbidden to visit. One night Anthony did visit there, while coming back with the cows, and the boy brought out some home-made wine which he warmly recommended. The boys drank it together. Anthony felt somewhat hilarious that evening at home, and was glad to get to bed. The next morning he had quite a "head" when he woke up. But he got up, and he and his father retired to the cow-shed. That is the only time he remembers ever having drunk liquor as a beverage in his life.

Harvey O'Higgins and Dr. E. H. Reede make much of this incident in the sketch of Comstock's unconscious motivation which they have included in their book, *The American Mind in Action*. They feel that he took away from the episode a great sense of guilt, and it is from this point of view that they interpret an incident which Comstock himself set forth as epoch-making in his life. His career, he felt, was shaped by his adventure with a mad dog. O'Higgins and Reede agree, but they do not accept the motives which he assigns to himself.

He was eighteen and clerking in a general store at Winnipauk, Connecticut, when an Irishman rushed in with the news that a mastiff had gone mad and was running through the village streets. The dog belonged to the local saloon-keeper. Comstock got a gun and pistol and went out to meet the dog. He went alone. A boy of his own age had agreed to accompany him but backed out at the last minute. Before beginning the hunt Anthony knelt in his room and prayed to God for courage and success. The

dog came upon him suddenly in a narrow road and Comstock had time to fire only once. It was a good shot, and the mastiff dropped dead. Before Anthony could return to his job at the store, a call came from the schoolhouse where another mad dog raged. Already the village had accepted Anthony as its champion against the rabid. This time he shot and missed. The dog charged straight toward him. In the nick of time a neighbor fired and saved Anthony.

This was the first Comstock crusade and the second followed shortly after. The owner of the first dog sold liquor to the women and children of Winnipauk. The story was that he would take groceries in exchange for whisky. Anthony turned his attention from the dead mastiff to its master. He appealed to the sheriff who took no action. Then under the pretense that he wanted apples, Comstock visited the place himself and had a chance to look about while being told that they kept no fruit. At night he went alone to the "gin-mill" and broke in by wrenching off a shutter. Once inside, Comstock raged against the kegs. He turned on the faucets and spilled all the liquor on the floor. Then he left a note warning the proprietor, who had been running without a license, that unless he shut up shop he might expect the building to come down next time. He "retired," Trumbull writes, "with something of the same consciousness of having done a good job completely that was felt when the first mad dog lay dead and harmless."

O'Higgins and Reede offer an explanation.

In other words [they write], Comstock, suffering from remorse and self-hatred because he had yielded to his neighbor's home-brew, saw in the saloon-keeper another tempter like the bad boy. He relieved some of his hatred of himself by killing the saloon-keeper's dog, and then he sought a further outlet for

his emotion by wrecking the saloon. In his conscious mind he explained his impulse as a defense of the children who might be bitten by the dog and of the men and women who might be victimized by the saloon. This, as we have already pointed out, is a common device of the Puritan mind. A hatred of the Flesh in yourself commonly gets its drainage as a hatred of the Flesh in others, and you do a sort of vicarious penance for your own abhorred weakness by punishing another's sin.

The theory of the analysts sounds plausible enough in its generality, but there is some reason to doubt that Mr. Comstock's "head" ever pressed heavily against his conscience. If his shame had been so great, he would not have told Trumbull. Much that is in his diaries he held back from his biographer. Indeed, there is reason to believe that Anthony felt a little proud of his lone drinking bout. Years later he found it humorous to feign drunkenness before the clerks of the Society for the Suppression of Vice.

The fear of liquor never seems to have touched Anthony closely. Although an ardent and stern teetotaler he was far less than a fanatic, as judged by present-day standards. Once after his marriage we find him recording the purchase of a bottle of brandy and two bottles of claret for his wife on a doctor's prescription, and Comstock himself was willing to accept alcohol for medicinal purposes. In the 1873 diary, he mentions "Beer" as a beverage consumed during an evening's jollity.

His own explanation of the mad dog incident seems more plausible than that of O'Higgins and Reede. He, too, appreciated that the happening had importance as a symbol of his life-work, and he used to say that he was proud of the fact that both dogs were killed before a single child had been bitten. And then he would add that it was a great pity that he could not say the same concerning "more

dangerous beasts of prey," the obscene book and picture dealers.

In this Comstock appears to have rationalized himself quite soundly. To him passion was, like rabies, a disease. One touch of lewdness could make a whole world mad. Not drink but sex was the big dog which had come close enough to Comstock to breathe upon him. And in later years it was not his custom to compromise with the dealers in pornography against whom he proceeded. As with mad dogs, the thing to do was to demolish them. There was no time for argument.

There seems something utterly fantastic in the life of Anthony Comstock. Surely it was a long shot that this boy who listened fondly and devotedly to the Bible stories he heard at his mother's knee should grow up to be so intimately concerned with literature of another sort, though still for the glory of God. Possibly it is, as some say, that in the Good Book itself there are qualities potentially exotic to the minds of the young and impressionable. Like the climate of Connecticut the chronicles of the Hebrew people swing from the austerity of the prophets to the passionate lyrics of Solomon. Surely it is not a book which ignores the lusts of the flesh, even though it condemns them. This violent and sturdy farm boy must have been stirred and vaguely troubled by the stories of such heroes of Israel as fell grossly away from grace. But, granted all this, a considerable gulf still remained between the Bible which Anthony read for blessedness and salvation, and the work which later it became his duty to examine.

"Week-day mornings Anthony would be up and out at four o'clock to feed the stock, cut wood and bring it in, and make himself generally useful." This has been the early training of many an American who rose to success in various fields of endeavor, and yet it seems the strangest sort of

preparation for one who would later scan the columns of the more daring newspapers and weeklies to pounce upon: "French Playing Cards per Pack \$1—Rich" or "The Great Magic Watch Charm—for Gentlemen—contains a 'Comique' Photograph, magnified 100 times."

Certainly even more than an ocean lay between Anthony Comstock and George Bernard Shaw, who was born on one of the many mornings that the New Canaan boy rose up at four to do the chores. Any book-maker should readily have quoted a million to one against the proposition that these two would ever clash.

But in it all Comstock detected a purpose. Looking back on it all he felt that nothing had been left to chance. There was in the beginning the will of God, and in addition the fact that Anthony moulded his life according to a purpose. Moulded it, he would say, in the direction indicated to him by his mother. She had been dead many years when Anthony carefully wrote out for one of his sisters a verse which Polly had taught him as a little lad.

*Build it well whate'er ye do.
Build it straight and strong and true.
Build it high and clean and broad.
Build it for the eye of God.*

And Anthony Comstock did take his life and shape it into a high wall.

H. B.

CHAPTER IV

"SHOULD I FALL"

TRUMBULL admits that Comstock was not always popular with his fellows in the Federal army. He explains that whisky was supplied to all the men as part of their regular ration and that there was some irritation over the fact that Anthony, after accepting his share, would then pour it on the ground. He refused to give to others what he would not use himself.

No mention is made of any such incident in the Civil War diary which Comstock kept in 1864, but he frequently refers to squabbles with his comrades. Very often he is "twitted."

Jan 20—Have been twitted several times today about being a Christian. "Would that I were a better one."

March 9—Heard some persons speaking against me. Do not know the reason. Tried hard to do my duty. Will not join with them in sin and wickedness; though loose all of their friendship. For Jesus is more precious than all the world. This I fear is the reason of their hatred or jealousy.

But sometimes hostility was expressed even by fellow church members.

Dec. 15—Were pained to see Brother W. under Satan's power. Called me a liar, but was excited. Doubtless he repents ere this. Pray earnestly for him this morning in Vestry room at church.

There was, too, on March 4, 1864, the strange irritation of Charlie, Comstock's tent-mate:

Charlie became offended at me and threatened to leave my tent because I worked too hard.

Concerning this charge there cannot possibly be denial. Comstock's energy throughout his army career was prodigious, although his regiment saw comparatively little action. His experiences under fire were slight. On February 9 he records:

Plantation in Northern part of John's Island. Arrived here about Sunrise. Skermisxhing commenced at little past sunrise with enemies. Almost the first thing that I heard in engagement was Bullet that came very near my head. Caused me to dodge. But for a kind Providence would have been killed.

There were a few other brief brushes in the twelve months of service, but the Seventeenth Connecticut spent the greater part of the year in a peaceful Florida sector. Anthony submitted himself faithfully enough to the routine of drills and inspection. A week or so after his enlistment he became a corporal. On the twentieth of March he was privileged to write: "This morning on inspection the Inspector took my Gun as the best cleaned in C. H. [Company H.] of privates: and took it up to Major's tent."

And on the next day the diary contained the entry:

Spent afternoon in reading, studying (Tactics) and writing: also part of the afternoon in studying cases. I resolved to know all that I can about Military life while in the Army.

Also the morale of the young recruit was excellent:

Detailed as Woodchopper, today: went out 4 miles on Jacksonville road. Worked faithfully—12 of us. Had

WEDNESDAY, MAY 18, 1864.

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Had a conflict with feelings this morning;
by God's Grace overcome them, and thus won
a brother that was offended. Shewed him I
was in earnest, in serving my Lord & Master;
O how happy, thus to singler, O how much
to be thankful to God for, Had a very excellent
meeting in eve. Good attendances, ~~Our hearts~~
were filled with love, O how happy, here, now
separate from friends; but not from God.
O make me faithful, Keep O keep me
from sin, Then am I happy, with Thee for
a friend, O for a first time, of what heaven is
still looking for. ^{THURSDAY 19} ~~Tris hard to be faithful~~
and overcome my evil temper, In afternoon
though a Suggler were against me yet by
Grace I was kept from doing what my own
conscience taught me was wrong, I little
offered resistance to Capt H when he was about
to punish him, most of men were with Little
could not be, for conscience would not allow
me to raise hand against any Officer in Command
O how blessed, to feel that God is with me ~~that~~
~~we are not~~, ~~Keep me O God from the world!~~
^{FRIDAY 20} Today have felt how blessed to feel that God
was with me, though some of comrades were
against me. O how precious thus to feel. Truly
God has answered and will answer my prayers
and keep me with a conscience void of offense
toward God & man. I desire to please all.
But rather than all, please God. ^{Right the way}
O night "Dickersons, Cavalry" captured 21
Privates & Worn. Com. ^{of Co. B.} ~~And Capt. H. & Co. D. & E. & F.~~
H of Co. B. were stationed 5 miles this side
and were not captured.

Conscientious in the performance of duty, Comstock
was unpopular with his fellows in the Union Army.

MONDAY, JULY 11, 1864.

On Camp guard. today. Very warm. No
Mail. Looked for boat most of time while
on Post as usual disappointed. Chorus very
in my nature; how weak, nothing, as it were.
Today very severely tempted, and led almost
into the lions' mouth. but Jesus has been
near me. He delivered, and blessed be his name.
O God, I would be "thine" in deed & truth. Make me
to do the humblest duty, and all to Thy glory,
honor & glory. With Thine O I pray, O God, shake me
thine sin dead. Keep my heart I pray the O God
for I am weak & sinful. Give me strength
Had ~~from~~ ^{from} Marshall to go to light house, with

TUESDAY 12.

Charles brook to Owsen over to reef coast, and
collected large quantities of shells. Intend to send
them to my friends. Am sure they will be pleased
with them. Had a pleasant day. No Mail today.
No Meeting again this evening. Took charge my-
self. Well, interesting, indeed did me very much
good. I was sent to bed quite weary. I am very busy now.
And I find to be of sitting day. In humble grateful prayer
I hope I long to be like Jesus. Love from Sir

WEDNESDAY 13.

Three chews today, for the Mail, which comes bring-
ing my papers for entering. Love Pat School. My
aim shall be to do my duty faithfully unto God,
doing all I can for those under me, and for kindling them
heavenward. Now again my prayer is answered. Bless
the Lord O my School, and forget not all his benefits.
Wrote to beloved friends of Martin Strader.
Tried to comfort them, as I would like to be comforted.
He was buried yesterday, below the Barracks. Had a
sweet hr. of prayer to night, aloud by side of Creek.
Love from Sir

Anthony's Civil War diary repeatedly expresses a
humble piety and a torturing conviction of sin.

quite a political argument with a Little Mac man who said, "give Southern states their rights, what they ask for, only so we have peace!" Never. Give us liberty or give us death, we want no home without a Country, no Country without a Government based on Liberty and Freedom to all mankind.

And yet there is ample evidence that neither the army nor the war against the South commanded the major portion of Anthony's interest and enthusiasm during the year of service. Enlistment afforded him an opportunity for a religious life more full and frequent than that which he had known in New Canaan. His diary is filled with references to prayer meetings. He attended services not less than four times in any week, and sometimes he went to church as often as eight or nine times within such a period. And this he did in spite of the fact that the Seventeenth Connecticut had no chaplain. Probably Comstock never showed his diary to any of his comrades. Some one of them might have set him straight regarding the spelling "chaplin."

Lacking a clergyman of their own, it became part of Anthony's self-imposed duty to scout around among other organizations and find ministers who would preach to his regiment. His enthusiasm for this good work never flagged. Thus after a march, he wrote on Saturday, February 13, "Today were so tired that could hardly walk"; but on the following afternoon he

worked all time to get seats in large tent to have prayer meeting in evening. Went to see Chaplin of 169th Regt. He promised to come and preach to us (Was Episcopalian). Came at ½ past 6 oclk. Had delightful meeting, good sermon. O how sweet is the word of God to us here in this land where there is no church of God to be seen.

Young Anthony was either uncritical or singularly fortunate, for out of the hundreds of sermons to which he

listened not once did he fail to record that the discourse was excellent.

Seemingly, he was always ready to take over any task which came to hand, whether or not it was in any way his official concern. Consider, for instance, his experiences on January 25:

Tryed drilling the company for the first time: and after drill got a book of tactics and studied that I might understand my business. Sat up last night with a man that had the delerium tremans.

Milder diversions did enter into the army life of Comstock.

Had an invitation to take "Supper" at Mrs Motts (Capt Swetlands). All Comry [Commissary] boys invited. Excellent eatables. Thought much of home and Soldiers in the field. My pathway seems strewn with flowers. How much to be thankful for. Enjoyed it more because I first did my duty. Relished "Ice Cream" very much. Great treat. Heard music on the piano.

Anthony did his duty and more, and it is hard to say whether it was his officiousness or his humility which nettled so many about him. Certainly he never hesitated to rush into a task through any conception of incapacity. Thus, it is startling to read the entry of May 30:

Commenced teaching the 6 colored Soldiers to spell. . . . Methink [he adds] the most sceptical would be convinced they can be taught: and the most rabied confess that they are above the beast, could they but see the spirit with which they study. Their perseverance and patience *far* surpasses many white people. O what pleasure do I take in this teaching the downtrodden of our land. Were I a prophet I would predict for them—some of them—a future as noble and as honorable as the whitest of our land. How true are their words when they say, "The White Man made us Thus."

At times the humility of Anthony seems a little strained and forced:

In the evening visited for a short time the Lady teachers of the Colored people who came in on the Steamer Delaware last evening. Did me much good to see some Northern Christian Sisters although strangers. They are very kind indeed; Little do they know, how pleasant it is for me to spend an evening with intelligent Christians. I was pained once or twice that they should praise me, for I deserve no praise. I can do no good thing of myself, nor do I deserve praising, but Jesus Christ is all my strength, all my righteousness.

Nevertheless, Comstock could be pushed to the point of self-assertion in violent forms:

Detailed to unload cargo of 280 lbs Meal, Hominy, Rye, Coffee, Sugar and Whiskey. Boys got very drunk, I did not drink a drop: and yet some were going to whip me. Knocked two over and kept on at duty. Touch not. Taste not. Handle not.

His principles in regard to nicotine were equally high, and this was an abstinence unusually difficult, for often the regiment found itself in swampy land where gnats and mosquitoes abounded. Comstock's solution of this difficulty is triumphantly recorded by Trumbull. "Not merely was tobacco a part of the good-fellowship of the camp," he writes, "but there were times when the smoke would have been a most grateful protection. . . . The others smoked; Comstock built smudges."

And in this picture one gets something of a prevision of the later life of Comstock. Always there remained about him something of fog and fury. He was never what you would call a companionable man, in spite of the fact that instinctively he took an interest in his fellow beings. A large part of the trouble lay in the fact that he had none

of the genial vices. He saved his own soul, but lost pretty much the whole world.

The principles of abstinence which he set for himself in the formative years were maintained in later life.

During thirty-seven years of close association with detectives and policemen he has never offered to buy a drink for one of them [Trumbull boasts], though the doing so might oftentimes have promised to smooth the way for his work. He is ready to provide policemen and others who may be helping him with first-class dinners, and to take care of any legitimate needs for them; but if they want liquor, they must look elsewhere for it.

When he was wounded in the service of the Society for the Suppression of Vice the surgeon who stitched up the gash across his face remarked, "There's no rum or tobacco to come out of *that* wound." Comstock was fond of telling this story, but he never explained just how the medical man was able to reach this conclusion by the mere inspection of the wound. Trumbull holds that dividends of robust health came to Anthony because he neither smoked nor drank.

But when, a little later, the whisky-drinking veterans fell out of line on the terrible forced marches, and the teetotaler country boy, green and unused to service, not only stood the strain, but carried the rifles of the exhausted veterans in addition to his own, the note of abuse turned into another tune. Then, as always, this man could endure more without whisky than the others could with.

The diary says nothing about this. Only one long march is mentioned and Comstock advanced for himself no claim of special prowess on that occasion. Here is his version:

Feb 12—Were ordered to fall in about half past 12 to start at 1 oclk for Folly I [Island]. Marched about 3 miles and wated 2 hrs. for tide to go down so that we could ford

creek. Forded about 3 o'clk. Water up to waist, very cold. Marched 7 miles, rested once, and arrived about sunrise on plantation where we stopped on Monday. . . . Arrived in camp about 4. Boys were very glad to see us back safe. We were very hungry. Eat so much were sick for hr or two. . . . Sold watch that I took of Segt. Gaff for 17 dollars to Sammy Morison.

It seems probable that the incident of carrying rifles for the others is apocryphal. As a matter of fact, Anthony's health during the Civil War period was less than superb. He records several illnesses during the term of his enlistment. Throughout his life Mr. Comstock was more or less prone to severe indigestion. He was, in early life at least, a heavy eater, and it may well be that he belonged among the group known to the Freudians as sufferers from the Midas complex.

Psychically Comstock was certainly sick through the greater part of his year's enlistment. Normally enough, he was exceedingly lonely, but this persisted beyond the period when most recruits are able to orient themselves to their new surroundings. Next to church-going, letter-writing seems to have been the chief concern of Anthony in camp. He wrote prodigiously to his family and his boyhood friends, and yet even in this activity there was a suggestion of constraint. The back of his Civil War diary is filled with a long list of the messages which he sent. Each time he jotted down the name of the recipient and the number of pages mailed to him. Opposite this column is another labelled "Letters Received," and in this the careful correspondent recorded the number of pages in the answers which he got. In striking up a balance one finds that Anthony came out a little the worse in this bargaining. During the twelve months he sent seven and one-half more pages than he received.

Though he joined his fellows of the army in neither tobacco nor alcohol, Comstock did make some friendly gestures to companions. He seems to have been called upon at times for loans of money even though his own resources were not large. A sergeant got five dollars from him; a captain, ten; and a major, twenty-five. These borrowings are duly noted, but there are no entries on the other side of the ledger. The men who ranked him seem not to have paid him back.

Argument might be made that Comstock deserved the thanks and friendship of his companions for all the trouble which he took in arranging religious services. Indeed, Trumbull is of this opinion. But perhaps the point is not well taken, for many of these meetings were indifferently attended, and new sources of friction grew out of Anthony's activities. During the latter part of his enlistment, a certain official stamp was put upon the young volunteer's missionary efforts. He became an agent of the Christian Commission—a job roughly equivalent to that of Y. M. C. A. Secretary—but this does not seem to have helped. In the Civil War the Y was not popular.

To Trumbull, Comstock's appointment stands out as the crowning sheaf in his army career. He tells of the manner in which H. Clay Trumbull, a Hartford minister and that official biographer's father, turned over the religious work to young Comstock.

In an Episcopal church on the Plaza in old St. Augustine, Florida [he writes], one Sunday during the dark days of our Civil War, a Connecticut army chaplain was conducting services. He had been doing this work since the arrival of his regiment, the Tenth Connecticut, for there was no Protestant pastor in the city, and the townspeople as well as the boys of the camp needed his care. But now his regiment was to move on, the Seventeenth Connecticut having come to relieve it; and this was his last service in the church. The

meetings must not stop—he was sure of that; but who was there to continue them? Finally he singled out a twenty-year-old Connecticut lad in the regiment that had just arrived, and, after the meeting had come to a close, he handed the boy the keys of the church and said to him with magnetic heartiness, “Keep up these meetings.”

It is fair to say that the minister was shrewd in recognizing the executive fitness of the young man whom he selected, and Anthony was true to the trust imposed upon him and successful in procuring chaplains. But his responsibility did bring him into bitter dispute with many members of his company. Trumbull says nothing of that, but Comstock tells of the trouble in his diary.

Today my heart was sad [wrote Anthony on April 24], because of unpleasent words that were used against me because I opposed the opening of our Church to the soldiers to use every night for singing and pleasure. Would that One of our Officers would stand out on the Lord's side, and help defend His cause and keep sacred His house from everything that would polute it. How *thankful* am I that I have a friend that is ever near.

Whatever the merits of the dispute, one must admire the courage of Comstock in sticking to his position. Both officers and men seem to have lined up against him and yet he did not yield in order to get favor. In the beginning something like a boycott seems to have been waged against the church of which he was the lay head. It was his custom to call the meetings by going up to the belfry and tolling the bell for five minutes. At the end of that time he would pray for five minutes and then ring again. But in spite of these calls to God and man the congregations were meager for many weeks. Later the numbers increased and Comstock may be said to have won his fight, but a trace of bitterness remained. Even by the month of December,

1864, when Comstock had been in service almost a year he had not yet completely won a place in the hearts of his companions in arms.

Dec 2—Seems to be a feeling of hatred by some of the boys, constantly falsifying, persecuting and trying to do me harm. Can I sacrifice Principle and conscience for Praise of Man. *Never.*

December 20—Moved up into a room alone by myself. After meeting went to go into room, all windows were closed tight, room full of smoke. Bunk full of rubbish and loaded with broken Benches, Chairs etc. Boys were initiating me. Had good laugh.

There was, we fear, something a little hollow in young Comstock's laughter. It was rather late in his period of membership for him to be forced to undergo initiation. Indeed, it is doubtful if he ever looked back on the Civil War days with any great amount of pleasure, in spite of the fact that he carried the consciousness of having done his duty sternly and completely. He seems, for instance, to have taken little interest in the activities of the G. A. R. after his graduation from the army. Occasionally, he did find that the seed sown during his ministrations bore fruit. Trumbull tells of one such instance, but even in this case Anthony had to wait some years for his reward.

Anthony acted for the Christian Commission at St. Augustine, rendering services to the sick and destitute, receiving keepsakes and forwarding them to friends at home, and distributing religious reading matter. When, in this work, he would come across men who were drinking and gambling, they would sometimes blackguard him roundly. One man who was under arrest, having been court-martialled for drunkenness, was particularly abusive of Comstock, who retaliated simply by leaving his best papers always with this man. Years afterward, in Brooklyn, in a meeting of the Sons of Temperance, a man

came up to Mr. Comstock and said, “Do you know me?” When Mr Comstock failed to recognize him, he explained that he was that abusive camp-mate, now converted, a “Son of Temperance,” and active in Christian work.

And this may have been one of the very fellows who heaped the rubbish into Mr. Comstock’s bunk!

Without doubt seeds which later grew abundantly were planted in Anthony Comstock by his Civil War service. The somewhat loose life of the army tightened his own sense of the proprieties, and his appointment as agent for the Christian Commission gave him some inkling of the power which authority could exercise against the disorganized children of darkness, however numerous. Already the itch to mould the conduct of others was upon him:

It seems as though intemperance was growing worse and worse every day. O that I were commander I know I would stop its progress. It seems as though Satan were set loose to drag men to destruction.

And it was during his early days in the army that Anthony Comstock had the pleasure of making his first arrest which was to be followed by so many in later days. This somewhat historic event occurred on January 18, 1864:

While on guard this morning took one prisoner and he was taken up to the Guardhouse and sentenced to be whipped.

Here was the first passenger for Comstock’s sixty-car train of culprits.

We have already observed that in the year 1864 Anthony was much concerned with his own transgressions, as well as with the sins of others. The diary is filled with confessions of guilt and outbursts of bitter remorse:

Again tempted and found wanting. Sin, sin. Oh how much peace and happiness is sacrificed on thy altar. Seemed

as though Devil had full sway over me today, went right into temptation, and then, Oh such love, Jesus snatched it away out of my reach. How good is he, how sinful am I. I am the chief of sinners, but I should be so miserable and wretched, were it not that God is merciful and I may be forgiven. Glory be to God in the highest.

O I deplore my sinful weak nature so much. If I could but live without sin, I should be the happiest soul living: but Sin, that foe that is ever lurking, stealing happiness from me. What a day will it be when that roaring Lion shall be bound & his wanderings cease, then will we have rest, the glorious rest free from sin. O hasten ever welcome day, dawn on our souls.

Today Satan has sorely tried me; yet by God's grace did not yeild.

This morning were severely tempted by Satan and after some time in my own weakness I failed.

Here, again, the consulting Freudian might contend that the weaknesses which tantalized and sometimes conquered Tony were the same "lines of temptation" of which he spoke to Trumbull when he told him of the fierce trials to which the Devil made him submit while he was still a boy on the farm. Even in a book intended solely for his own reading, Comstock imposed upon himself a certain reticence of expression. He could bring himself to name the Devil but not all his works. Now and again, however, he does blurt out the precise nature of his transgression as on November 9, when he confessed in the sanctity of the diary:

Spent part of day foolishly as I look back, read a Novel part through.

In justice to Comstock, it should be said that this seems the only time during his entire year of army life at which he yielded to this particular form of folly. The æsthetic

interests of the young recruit are not very considerable. He makes almost no mention of color, although he was a New England boy in Florida for the first time. The word "beauty" breaks into his vocabulary almost not at all. But once he was stirred. It was on the evening of October 12, 1864, that Anthony looked at the moon and called it good.

This evening is one of nature's choicest. Horizon unspotted with cloud. Moon lavishing upon the earth its purest crystal ray of light. Stood on Barracks, looked off over ocean, as it lay basking in Moonlight's silvery rays. How grand the sight! Beautiful indeed.

But almost on the instant he wrote this Anthony realized that he had come close to the borderland of sin. The Devil himself might be on the other side of the moon, and the silver sheen could come up from the pit of Hell. These were vain things and of the earth. To be preoccupied with them was the part of pagans. And so Anthony added a post-script after his brief fling into æsthetic appreciation.

What glory for earth [he wrote] but it is not to be compared to that which is to be revealed in the last day. There's *more* Glory and Beauty, and *all* peace, joy, rest and happiness. What is here to keep us here compared to it.

No, in the matter of the joys of this earth Comstock confessed himself a defeatist. Here were traps, and men lived as do the beasts. Constantly from over the edge of even the greenest hill came the wild notes from the bugle of Satan, that great hunter. One might see patches of purple and of scarlet in a meadow, but from out these garden spots there came always to the ear of Anthony the yipping of the hounds of Hell loosed to track and tear every good man. Better to live in barren places where the dogs could not steal upon him masked by thickets which might seem beauti-

ful to the vain and finite eyes of mankind, which is corruptible.

Who would stay here in sin and continue to grieve the Spirit of God. No, rather welcome death, than sin. Oh to be so pure as to know no sin. My soul longs for Heaven. Friends, I love you well, but oh if I could but reach that realm where sin never comes I would bid you adieu forever in this world. Sin makes my soul sad today but hope comes to the relief. Christ is all sufficient. Bless the Lord o my soul and forget not all his benefits. I will go to my Father and he will give me peace.

And this was a forced march. On and on like John Brown's soul, the body of Anthony Comstock was marching. He had begun the search for tranquillity and peace of mind, but he never found it this side of the grave even though he went armed and struck with all his might at every devil dog which yapped behind his heels. Indeed, Comstock did better than that. As when a boy in Winnipauk, he did not wait the approach of any hound which carried death and madness in his mouth. Comstock turned and charged the pack which plagued him. Like a good soldier he seized the offensive for his own and faced the foe which is temptation.

H. B.

CHAPTER V

DEAR M.

WHEN the young soldier was mustered out in the summer of 1865, he went back to New Canaan. The Comstock farm had fallen on evil days. It had been heavily mortgaged, and the deed was held by persons sympathetic to the South. After Anthony's enlistment the mortgage had been foreclosed. Chester, the "noble brother" of Anthony's diary, had become the head of the family, and the two little sisters made their home with him.

Concerning the father, information is scanty. Before the war, he had gone to England on business, and the catastrophe of the loss of the farm fell on the sons who remained at home. This obscure business, for which he had crossed the sea, did not turn out well, and Thomas Anthony Comstock added to his troubles by making an unhappy second marriage. The new wife was young and extravagant. She presented her husband with four sons. Of this family we know little, except that Tony was later called upon to help them financially.

In 1865 there was little to hold Tony in New Canaan. His brother Roger was later sadly to recall that at Sam's funeral the family had been united for the last time. The beloved mother was only a memory—imperfectly recalled by a photograph taken after her death, so untrue to her living self that on his death-bed Chester would ask the baby sister, Hattie, to destroy it.

Anthony went to New Haven, where he boarded in the family of a returned missionary, while he worked as clerk

and bookkeeper in a grocery store. At this time, his was apparently the outlook usual to the ambitious New Englander, in whom a stern piety mingles agreeably with financial acumen. The young grocery clerk wanted to go to the big, the wicked city. He wanted to make a success there. It was his dream that he might some day own a large drygoods business.

He was kin, this determined young man, to a host of other Connecticut boys whose names were being written large on the New York business records of that day. "Merchant and philanthropist" notes the encyclopædia again and again. They sat on the boards of churches, Baptist, Presbyterian, Congregational. They labored on behalf of hospitals and colleges and theological schools. Wherever good works, wherever prayer meetings and Sunday Schools and uplift organizations were to be found, there were the men from Connecticut also. To charity they gave largely of their substance, when God had favored them with success. They were great philanthropists. But, first, they were great merchants.

Anthony was not satisfied to remain in the New Haven grocery store. But he was young and poor, and he did not yet clearly see what he was to do. He was offered a job at Lookout Mountain in Tennessee, to act as outdoor superintendent of the work of transforming Government hospital buildings into school dormitories. For several months he tried this, finding time to ship home a squirrel to the two young sisters at Chester's. But after a while, he came back to New Canaan, tired out. Trumbull relates that one day in Norwalk he met an acquaintance, a banker, who said to him, "Comstock, why don't you go to New York and make your mark?" When the young man explained that he had no money, the banker gave him a five-dollar bill, and with this our hero set forth to seek his fortune, arriving in New

York with three dollars and forty-five cents in his pocket.

After a week of job-hunting, after lonely evenings of prayer in a cheap lodging house in Pearl Street, young Comstock was offered a job as porter in a drygoods house, and took it. So efficiently did he perform that he was given the post of shipping clerk, and this he kept for three years, until he went to another drygoods house to act as stock clerk and also to sell a little on the side.

He had an illness brought on by long hours and poor food, but by 1871 he was getting twenty-seven dollars a week in a new job as salesman for the drygoods establishment of Cochran, McLean and Company. During these years we know that he was often distressed by the interest shown in erotic books and pictures by his young business associates; and we shall see that in 1868 he had gone so far as to have two book-dealers arrested.

Somehow he had scraped together five hundred dollars, and by paying down this amount he was able to buy a little house in Brooklyn. Before this, he had been living in boarding houses in Brooklyn and Williamsburg. He had poignantly longed for a home of his own. This dream was now to be realized; Comstock was in love.

The bride was ten years older than he, but it has never been discovered that he cared about that. Her name was Margaret Hamilton, and her father, a Presbyterian elder, had failed in business. The details of the disaster are dim, but certain it is that Maggie and her unmarried sister, Jennie, had been obliged to shoulder much of the burden of the family's support. They had worked wearisome hours in their father's store, and the problem of whether the stock could be advantageously sold was communicated to Maggie's suitor as a burning problem. Jennie, although she outlived Tony and her sister, was to pass long years in their home as a bed-ridden invalid. And Maggie, too, was

worn out, was never strong. Tony's younger sister, Hattie, was one day to see among Maggie's things the photograph of a beautiful girl, and to ask eagerly who it might be.

"Why, it used to be taken for me," Maggie told her with a small smile. The young Hattie looked up puzzled from the picture, unable to discern a resemblance between its bloom and the faded face beside her.

Maggie was sensitive about the discrepancy in age between herself and her husband, and perhaps for this reason would never have her photograph taken after her marriage. But she had a shy spirit of her own, and when in conversation thoughtless persons introduced the subject of young husbands and older wives, Maggie never failed to speak up. "Oh, love doesn't go by ages," she always told them.

Anthony's love for his mother was to be a living thing all through his life, and perhaps he found it easy to love this faded, sweet and self-effacing woman whom he had chosen as his bride. They were married on a clear, beautiful day in January, 1871, and left for Philadelphia on the four o'clock train. It took five hours to make the trip, and Maggie was very tired when they reached the Bingham House at Eleventh and Market Streets.

Yet it was a *bright* ride for us [the bridegroom wrote in his little pocket diary], and all seems bright in the future, and my darling is at last *free* from her long years of cares. Surely God's hand is in all this.

They breakfasted next morning at ten o'clock, and the fact seems worthy of note in the small space of the diary. Tony was a farm boy, and Maggie's life had never been one of self-indulgence. Resting in the morning was a frivolous, an amazing thing; in their Brooklyn home the breakfast hour was to be seven o'clock. But the new husband is inclined to belittle this single dissipation, genially

Cochran & Co.

McLean & Stotsbury

Cochran, McLean & Co.
462, 464 & 466 Broadway,
Cor Grand St.

P.O. Box 425

New York Nov 13th 1871

Justice Walsh.

Police Court, City of Brooklyn.

Sir:

I have the honor to call your attention to the trial of John Chapman that has been adjourned so many times without even a hearing being granted. Said Chapman's place is open every Sunday, and has been without exception since Oct. 1st in violation of all law: and furthermore, he has since you issued the warrant for his appearance in your Court to answer for violating the Sunday Law, sold to children, ^{to my personal knowledge} ~~all~~ on Sunday, and I have had occasion to go for a Policeman to remove drunkards ^{and they were men who went into his saloon} ~~men~~ from his corner, for interfering with ladies returning from Church. ^{at 2 1/2 P.M. approx, this on Sunday Oct 29th} My witnesses are all men of business, and gentlemen of the greatest respect, and you have submitted them and myself to great inconvenience, by bringing us away so often from business for nothing but

On the stationery of the wholesale drygoods house where he worked as a salesman, Anthony penned a protest to Justice Walsh against the repeated adjournment of the case of John Chapman, charged with violating the Sunday closing law.

to hear the case adjourned. The evidence is clear and
positive in this case, therefore, I pray you, in the name
of law and justice that this case may be brought to
trial on the coming Saturday. I will do the part
of a law abiding citizen by being there promptly with
my witnesses.

I have the honor to be

Very Respectfully Sir:

Your Obt. Servant

W. Courtcock.

354 Grand ave.

regarding it in the light of a high occasion. "M. seemed troubled about going down so late," runs the diary, "but when she saw the Dining Room full of lazy people we had a hearty laugh." It snowed "like *fury*" that day, and on a visit to the United States Mint "M. most perished with cold before we got back to hotel."

There was a visit to Independence Hall, which inspired Anthony to the pious wish that there were Puritan fathers still, and two days later the wedding trip was extended to Washington. They left Philadelphia at eleven at night, arriving in the Capital at six the next morning.

There were 8 Brides & grooms in our car [the diary elaborates]. When we connected with the train from N. Y. I secured a double berth in a Pullman Palace Car. M. was both surprised and delighted, as she never had been in one before. We took off our things and made ourselves at home.

They have arrived in Washington on a Sunday, and again it is evident that Anthony is in such festive humor that he condones a lapse from his familiar observances. Travelling on Sunday was to him a sin; and later in the year he is to observe that he intends to give up his Sunday School class in a Brooklyn Mission because "I feel I ought to leave there and labor in a field nearer home and where I will not need to patronize the Cars so much on Sunday." On this desecrated day, they attended the Methodist Church favored by President Grant. The entry in the diary adds a pertinent comment. "Does not seem like the Christian Sabbath here. All is excitement."

Although their room at the Arlington House is so cold that they are forced to move to another hotel, Anthony's enthusiasm for the establishment is undamped.

"This is the grandest House that I ever have stopped at,"

he says of this cheerless-sounding hostelry, "and is crowded to overflowing. M. thinks it very grand."

Their sightseeing has an innocent thoroughness. Tony is excited and eager, impressed by everything. Beside him, Maggie seems almost *blasé*, but it must have been the indifference of a great weariness. Her husband wants to go everywhere and, though Maggie's impressions are unfailingly reported as pleasant, it is clear that she is tired, that she prefers the quiet evenings in the hotel to rambunctious expeditions through the raw, snow-filled streets.

She is taken to see the Senate and the House of Representatives in session, and through driving rain is conducted to the Post Office and the Patent Office. They are forced, because of inclement weather, to abandon a plan for attending Mrs. Grant's reception. But that evening Tony slips off to the White House. "This book would not hold the Description of its beauty and grandeur," he reverently reports.

After this they go to New Jersey, to Freehold, for a week's stay with Maggie's married sister, Annie. Then, at last, they can be in the little house that Anthony has bought. His anticipation is eager. There is an almost breathless excitement about this occasion for him, and it is a sacred occasion, too, for which he must give God thanks.

O so bright, so sweet [he writes]. I cannot realize this great blessing. O let me consecrate myself to the one who has bestowed all this upon me. Let my home, my all be his. [The next day he writes], I kindly stayed around house today, fixing up things. It is so bright and sweet now to live. So changed, so different.

There is something homely and tender in his jottings during this first year of their marriage, in the things that he thought it important to record. He speaks often of

"dear M." and "my precious little wife." She is "a blessed gift" to him. He must often have tried her gentle and timid soul, but one of his sisters remembered that Maggie often exclaimed, "Oh Hattie, he *is* such a dear good boy!"

Many little scenes spring to life in this diary of 1871. He breaks her flower basket while she is out, and goes to buy her another. Before he gets home, she has returned. She meets him laughing, as though nothing had happened. But when she sees the new basket he has brought for her, she can scarcely speak. . . . During an attack of tonsillitis, he fashions a bird house, and one night he hurries home to raise it, commenting with satisfaction, "It looks quite grand. . . ." Once he stays home from church to cook Sunday dinner for Maggie and Father Hamilton. He admits to being almost worn out by this. . . . She goes on a visit, and the home seems dark without his "sunshine." . . . On a hot July evening, he writes:

Got home and found little Wifey out. Found a dress partly done and I finished it on the machine for her and had the bastings almost out before she came. How she laughed.

He is so nice about her family. They are always around, and he is unfailingly glad to see them.

Cousin Delia and Father H. paid us a visit today and staid to tea. It is so grand to have them come and see us and feel that it is our home they are in. We feel anxious for Father H. to come and stay with us.

He writes this before they are fairly settled in the little house on Grand Street. In March, when the store and its stock are at last sold, they have a celebration.

Frank, Annie and little Annie and Father came home with us last night, and we had a Turkey dinner in honor of my birthday and this event. M. said when all seemed dark that the stock would be sold all right, for she had placed it in higher hands.

Already in this first year of their marriage, Jennie has come to stay with them; and there seem always to be visitors, received with joy and sped with regret. When "little Annie," Maggie's small niece, arrives, it is an occasion for special rejoicing. She calls him "Uncle Tony." It is all very "jolly," and this is the gayest word he knows, and the one he requisitions to describe festivities. He loves little Annie, because she is a child, and this man, always obstinate and often hot-headed, is tender with children. By spring he must know that he is to have a baby of his own, but the diary holds no hint of this expectation.

His simple happiness in his home must now have been complete. His young sister, Hattie, the child to whom he sent a squirrel from Lookout Mountain, was to recall his love for children as her most vivid memory of this brother. He had a habit of carrying cheap rubber toys in his pocket, against a need for them. Often, walking down a street with him, she was obliged to pause while he went to some small crying child. For he never could pass the child, never go on until it had been comforted. "Wait a minute, Hat!" he would cry, and she would stand patiently, while he stooped down, speaking soothingly and fumbling in his pocket for one of the rubber toys.

With children this blustering and arrogant fellow could be tactful. During his many years as a vice-crusader, he kept on his office desk a roll of red legal tape. Often he used this to admonish some small boy. He would wind the tape twice around the child's clasped hands. "Now break that," he would direct him; and the child would break it. Then again he would wrap the tape about the small hands, six, ten, a dozen times. "*Now* break it." But the child could not. So it was with habit, he gently explained. One who worked with Comstock in his later years

remembered that often a grown man would come to the old reformer's desk to thank him for help he had given him as a boy.

On December 4, 1871, there is a brief, official notice in the diary: "A little daughter born this morning about 8:15 A.M. Weighs 9 Lbs." But his happiness over this new guest was to be impermanent. Early in the summer following her birth, the small Lillie died. That night Comstock wrote, "The Lord's will be done. Oh, for grace to say it and live it!" Two years later on a journey, when a little girl fell asleep in his arms, his thoughts returned to his own baby. "I could but think of my own sweet precious Lillie, now gone Home. Now evermore pure, waiting for her parents."

Maggie was old for child-bearing, and she never had another baby. Perhaps, seeing her fragile weariness, the husband knew there could be no hope of this. In any case, soon after Lillie's death, he visited in the performance of some duty a slatternly flat in a tenement near Chinatown. Here a girl baby had just been born, and the mother lay dying. When she was gone, Comstock took the little girl home to Maggie. Her name was Adele, and in the Brooklyn courts he made her legally his.

Adele was never very bright. She grew into a straggling, subnormal child, whom the employees in Comstock's office detested to take around with them, when he brought her in to see the sights of the city. She made herself conspicuous after the manner of stupid children, doing annoying and slightly malicious things. When her foster father died, she was a woman of more than forty, and so troublesome that it was judged necessary to put her in an institution. But they say that Comstock never knew that Adele was not like other children. She was always devotedly attached to him. You wonder what Maggie thought, whether she

knew about Adele? Perhaps, as she had done in the sale of the stock of Father's store, Maggie had placed Adele in higher hands, and knew she would come out all right.

She lived a life withdrawn, this wife of Anthony Comstock. Initiative played small part in her nature; and perhaps, if we had known her well, we should have little more to tell of her. Once, on a trip to Saratoga, when they had spent the evening watching the dancing in the hotel ball-room, her husband wrote, "Dear M. seems to take delight in watching others. She seems so happy and quiet. It is so sweet to take her around to see new and strange places and scenes."

Clear it is that she worried about her husband, that her life must have been a tense and protracted agony of anxiety. One neighbor in Summit, New Jersey, where she and Tony spent most of their married life, was to wonder how she went on living. He was always provoking quarrels, this mad, obstinate husband of hers, always running his opinionated head into something that was not his affair. When he was sixty years old, he went to New Haven to make an arrest, and in the early morning the neighbor mentioned above heard Maggie's wavering tones on the telephone. Her husband had not come home. But soon he was brought in, heavily bandaged, with ribs crushed in by the force of the kick that had flung him down a flight of stairs, up which he was pursuing his victim. But he had made the arrest—so it was all right. Maggie put him to bed and nursed him tenderly. What did she think, this dim, self-effacing little woman who had said that he was such a dear, good boy? In the early days of their marriage, she must have ventured one timid protest. In May, 1871, the diary notes,

Got very much provoked at M. tonight, and left the house rather than speak unkindly. O that she would not worry so much as to what People will say. It pains me.

Already, though he is only twenty-seven and his course in life has not yet been chosen, he is more aggressive, more earnest and more dissatisfied than the common run of men. For him the round of the home circle, the mission picnic where Maggie's cake draws loud praises, the sail up the Hudson to West Point, the visits to the Navy Yard and Prospect Park, are not enough. These things are sweet—they are almost the sweetest things he has ever known. He is proud to have people come to the little house, and when they comment on how bright and "pleasant" it is, he is gratified by their praise. But there is something more than this, something more that his soul craves. He is forever wandering, restless and dissatisfied, a spirit lost between earth and heaven. He is eaten by a longing to live nobly, to do his duty. One June evening, when he and Maggie have paid a call on their neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. H. B. Spelman (their daughter had married a Mr. Rockefeller), he records with satisfaction his impression of these two:

They both seem so earnest. They feel that "life is earnest" and one must be earnest to live. I hate this milk and water system. Give me a man who dares to do right and one ready at *all times* to discharge his duty to the community and to God.

This, you are forced to realize, was a man terrible in his earnestness. Trumbull declares that he was fond of a joke, but he cannot have had much humor. The only jokes that these collaborators were able to discover were of a practical nature. He was fond of April Fool's Day, and would try to trap the people in his office by innocent little idiocies, in which they humored him. Then there were those rare occasions of ebullient spirits, in which he would feign intoxication. And it is said that during a trial he once handed a juror an exhibit, consisting of a book which exploded when the unfortunate man opened it. But these

are sorry points on which to base a reputation for humor, and we may take it that this was a soul essentially and profoundly grave.

It troubles him in the year 1871 because business is bad and customers are few. His sharp anxiety over money contrasts with his domestic happiness; but he must worry, for he has assumed new responsibilities. He is, moreover, in debt, and until he has changed this he can have no peace. "Trade still holds dull," he notes again and again. There is a ring of defiance, when he writes, "Comstock not discouraged because my trust is in one who hath all things to bestow"; but with less assurance he continues, "O for grace to trust my God." Again he writes, "Surely I ought not to doubt my Maker God. If he cares for the Lillies of the field, will he not care for me." Sometimes he admits his doubts: "Faith weak and my heart faint," and again, "My heart aches and my head also. I know I am in God's Hand and though he slay [*sleigh* crossed out] me, yet will I trust him, if He will give me grace to bear."

His very doubts add to his misery.

Last year when I prayed much, I worked hard and was successful. The fault is partly my own. I must arise and pray and labor, looking to God, then I am sure to succeed. I will arise and go to my Father and say unto Him, Father, I have sinned.

So he rushes around, trying to stir up new customers, greeting those that come to him with an enthusiasm born of his prayers for help. But something is lacking. He has not the consuming energy, the single-hearted love of his work which would bring success. Or perhaps it is the reverse; perhaps his lack of success is the cause of his failing buoyancy. "I feel so little like business," he writes, "I seem to have lost my enthusiasm. I am too cold." It is

possible that this dictatorial and forthright fellow, who was to make so many bitter enemies, was ill-suited to the amenities of salesmanship. Certainly here was a man who loved better to domineer than to conciliate. And Trumbull says that, as a matter of principle, Comstock never treated a customer to a drink.

But every Sunday there are vital things in his life. There is church, of course, in the morning. In the afternoon he has a Sunday School class of boys in a mission. But this is not enough, he must be doing more. "I am resolved to be the Lord's, to live for and work and speak for him, regardless of what men may say," he writes; and the following day, a Sunday, he pays a visit to the "Hospital and Jail" with a returned missionary. There are no religious services in the jail, so on the following Sunday he goes with a group of "Christian Brothers and Sisters" to hold a prayer meeting in the women's ward. "I feel greatly encouraged," he writes after this meeting. So week after week he labors on, though the Christian brothers and sisters prove for the most part delinquent after the first meeting. The project had proved unpopular and had even, it appears, met with criticism. "I know the Lord is able to bless us and the word to these poor degraded souls," he writes. "His grace is sufficient, even though men may doubt and ridicule."

By June, 1871, he has discovered another outlet for those energies which could not find their full expression in selling drygoods. He is outraged by the violation of the Sunday closing law by certain saloons in his neighborhood.

Yesterday saw two Liquor saloons open and called Police officer 134 to close them. He refused. I threatened to report him and he told one partie he had better pull his door too. I have today preferred charges before the Police Commissioners. I am determined to act the part of a good Citizen and wher-

ever a man breaks the laws I will make him satisfy the laws demands if in my power.

He has always believed in authority and in order, and he likes to bear his part in their enforcement. Into this channel he can enthusiastically pour all his earnestness, his conviction, his thwarted longings to be active, to dominate, to be of service, to be in the right, to perform and to reform. Not long after his first tilt at the saloons, he bursts out indignantly against the public morals of his day:

O how I loath the actions of corrupt officials in our city. This is a murderous age. Crime stalketh abroad by daylight and Public officers wink at it. Money can buy our judges and corrupt our juries. But God helping me, it shall never buy or sell me. I believe Jesus [he adds] never would wink at any wrong nor would he countenance it.

Trade still holds dull, and the future seems black. He tries to solace himself by calling on the Commissioners of the Excise Board. One saloon is less than a block away from the little Grand Street house, and its proprietor, Chapman, evidently has police protection. By October, Chapman walks up and down in front of Comstock's house, threatening him. So dangerous is he that Comstock calls on the Mayor and the Chief of Police, who advise him to defend himself. So he buys a revolver. Chapman menaces him on his very doorstep, threatening to take his life, to pull down his house, to drive him from the neighborhood. He makes to attack Comstock, but the sight of the revolver scares him off.

Comstock is in the thick of it now. He is fighting, and in a good cause. There is little else in the diary, which he has fallen out of the habit of keeping very faithfully. Now he does not even note that trade holds dull, or that he is

glad God reigns. This fierce conflict with the powers of evil is the engrossing thing.

He goes before the Board of Excise and gives his evidence, and before Justice Walsh he makes out an affidavit. The judge issues warrants for the arrest of the two saloon-keepers, Chapman and McNamara, admitting that the former is a bad, a foul-mouthed man. Now begins a weary process of adjourning the case, while Comstock repeatedly marshals his witnesses into court, only to retire chagrined by another delay. One of the men who supports him in this business is his neighbor, Mr. Spelman. Between times Anthony spies at the door of Chapman's saloon, watches the men and women, and questions a little girl who comes out with a pail of ale.

In the midst of these proceedings, a matter for solemn comment, McNamara drops dead behind his bar, and Comstock observes that he has gone to a higher tribunal. Outside Chapman's place as the case drags on, men wait with stones in their hands, while the champion of righteousness passes on his way to Sunday School. Later in the afternoon, these same men come out of the saloon, "very drunk and Boisterous," to the confusion of ladies returning from church. He calls a policeman, but the men quickly scatter. At last, in November, he writes to Justice Walsh, urging him not to adjourn the case again.

Chapman, in the end, lost his license, and was driven out of business. The cause of righteousness had triumphed, and its leader could look about him for new worlds to conquer. Did he know that he stood on the brink of a momentous decision? In the diary of 1871, there is no indication of it, except his great unrest and dissatisfaction. He had had his tilt at the demon rum. That he was to engage against the demon pornography, there is in this small document no hint at all. We might suspect that he

had forgotten certain experiences of three years earlier, when we know that he was concerned with the traffic in evil books. Yet he has not forgotten. Of this period of his life, his faithful biographer, Trumbull, wrote:

In his close contact with the young business men of the city, he saw them falling about him almost like autumn leaves, withered at the blighting touch of the obscenities that were the staple of so much commercialized traffic.

Though it does not appear in the pages of the diary, this was a man who walked in the shadow of a destiny. We cannot see the forces at work, but somehow he is being shaped and moulded. The arrests made in 1868 are of the color of his life's strong pattern. To each man the task that lies to his hand. Comstock had pondered well the Scriptures, and he knew that "a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations" is one of the six things hated by the Lord.

M. L.

CHAPTER VI

THE HYDRA-HEADED MONSTER

WHEN the tides of the Civil War receded, there was strange wreckage on the beach. The hulk of the democracy, so recently strained by a fearful convulsion, showed a hundred cracks. Political and financial calamities cursed the country. In the prolonged disorder of the Reconstruction, the inevitable post-war hysteria and unrest were intensified. It was a period of melodramatic crime, of corporate theft, of extravagance, of specious prosperity, in which the inflation of the currency, wild speculation and vast railroad expansion played a part.

Social behavior, notoriously lax in the years succeeding war, dissolved in the easy warmth of plentiful money. All that was vulgar in the republic, all that was raw and crude, rose to the surface and floated there. In the railroads, in the great developing steel industries, in wild gambling in Wall Street, vast fortunes were being made, and they were grandiosely spent. Then in September of 1873, the country's bric-a-brac prosperity crashed. Speculation during inflation had run its course. In four years, almost twenty-five thousand miles of railroad had been constructed in the United States. Promoters were in default on securities approximating two hundred and twenty-nine millions of dollars. With the collapse came panic, followed by an era of business depression. The reckless pace of the country slackened. A new facet of the post-war period was carved.

But not only out of prudence and lean purses did the

people of the democracy turn to graver ways. A powerful social reaction set in, perhaps as significant as the financial disaster, and subservient to laws no less compelling. Flagrant immorality gave strength to the pendulum's backward swing. The voice of the reformer was heard in the land. The stage was set for a stern and rigorous revival of the spirit of the Puritan forefathers. "The new Puritanism," writes Henry L. Mencken in his essay, *Puritanism as a Literary Force*, "is not ascetic, but militant. Its aim is not to lift up saints, but to knock down sinners."

A plant indigenous to the American temper, the spirit of reform now flowered in rampant profusion. The resuscitation of the temperance movement, the development of the Young Men's Christian Association, the Young People's Society for Christian Endeavor, the "clean-up" campaigns in which the big cities purged themselves of vice,—these are but a few evidences of freshly kindled enthusiasm for the enforcement of righteousness. The complexion of these activities was in every case devout. Closely allied with them were the more directly religious doings of the Salvation Army, the Moody and Sankey revivals, and the Sunday School movement.

Nowhere had the post-bellum latitude of manners been more evident than in the city of New York, where both wealth and vice were densely concentrated. Incongruously, the genteel and pious decorum of respectable "society" overlaid, like an antimacassar, the gaudy vulgarity of the day. These church-going folk might turn aside from scandal. The immorality of New York was still a nightmare tale with which to startle country folk; and no hand was raised against it, for Boss Tweed reigned in the city.

Among the church-going folk who did not turn aside—who indeed stared at the evils of the city with righteous horror—were the good gentlemen of the local Y.M.C.A.

In 1866 they had prepared for private circulation a survey, titled "A Memorandum Respecting New York as a Field for Moral and Christian Effort Among Young Men; Its Present Neglected Condition; and the Fitness of the New York Young Men's Christian Association as a Principal Agency for Its Due Cultivation." In this pamphlet, it was observed that clerks and apprentices, formerly boarded in the homes of their employers and "directly under the eye" of those gentlemen, were now subjected to the frequently vicious and certainly ambiguous influences of boarding houses, where, unable to afford fires in their rooms, they were readily persuaded to spend their evenings elsewhere. There followed a description of the places to which the young men might go—Billiard Saloons, Theaters, Gambling Hells, Porter Houses and Bar-Rooms, Houses of Prostitution and Assignation, and Concert or "Pretty Waiter Girl" Saloons.

In this same year, the Y.M.C.A. received a letter from a grateful clerk who had chanced to attend one of their meetings and had there been induced to sign the pledge. His letter described to the directors those very evils whose extent they had just discovered.

Inexperienced young men [he wrote] flock here in thousands from all parts of the country; leave friends and relatives behind. Their first acquaintance is a boarding house of dissipated young men and "diseased furniture." Around St. John's Park, hundreds of young men are "bunked" in those large boarding houses. I have been through "Hash Row" myself. After tea the question goes around amongst the young men: "Well, Harry, what are you going to do with yourself tonight?" "I'll play you billiards for drinks." "Where are you going, Jack?" "I'm for the opera." "Well, come, take a drink before you go." One is going to see his little milliner in Houston Street, another to play bagatelle for lager, others to play faro (particularly if it is pay day), some to have

a show at cards, some down to Madame Vonderbush's to see if she has any fresh emigrant girls, others to pick up Cyprians on Broadway, some to theaters and oyster suppers. Very, very seldom do you hear one say, "I'm going to a prayer meeting."

But in the fullness of his recent change of heart, this young man added a P.S. to his letter:

When my old comrades say to me, "Come, Jack, let's go over to Delmonico's, and take a drink," my answer will be, "I'll walk up to the 'Louvre' with you, Harry, if you will sign the pledge in a room and library just over the pretty waiter girls—the Young Men's Christian Association."

Now among the temptations which littered the path of the inexperienced young men, there was one which had filled the Christian directors with especial horror and disgust. This was the temptation of obscene books and papers which are said to have been sold on the streets at that period as freely as roasted chestnuts.

The traffic in these is most extensive [their memorandum of 1866 declared]. They are to be obtained at very many newspaper stands. As illustrating the audacity with which this temptation is flaunted in the faces of young men, it may be stated that, at one place, on a principal thoroughfare, there are openly exposed for sale two vile weekly newspapers, which can be purchased at ten cents a copy, and more than fifty kinds of licentious books, each one illustrated by one or two cuts, at prices ranging from thirty-five to sixty cents. . . . The debasing influence of these publications on young men cannot be over-estimated; they are feeders for brothels.

In their distaste for erotic publications, the gentlemen of the Y.M.C.A. were fulfilling the tradition from which they sprang. Obscenity had been no part of the *mores* of the Puritan. Under the common law of England, as the temporal courts gradually assumed the functions of the



A photograph of Anthony Comstock, taken at the outset of his vice-hunting career, shows an earnest, dignified and resolute young man. The features here represented were to be subjected to forty years' maltreatment at the hands of mischievous cartoonists.



The frontispiece to Comstock's first book, "Frauds Exposed," shows a rear view of the New York Post-Office, with mail bags containing fraudulent and obscene circulars. On the left the evil-doers are depositing obscene books and circulars, while on the right a shamefaced gentleman in a silk hat receives his mail.

ecclesiastical courts, obscenity had long been a crime, and this same common law was in force in the American colonies, and later in the States. The case of the *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania v. Sharpless*, was tried in 1815. The indictment charges that certain yeomen, "being evil-disposed persons," exhibited in a private house "*a certain lewd, wicked, scandalous, infamous and obscene painting, representing a man in an obscene, impudent and indecent posture with a woman*, to the manifest corruption and subversion of youth, and other citizens of this commonwealth, to the evil example of others in like case offending, and against the peace and dignity of the commonwealth of Pennsylvania." The case was decided against the evil-disposed yeomen.

If the courts of law gave assurance that obscenity was intolerable to the Puritan, the statute books had their testimony as well, including among other things provisions against obscene daguerreotypes and ballads. We may assume that literature and pictures of the sort had been in circulation since Colonial times. Not until the twentieth year of the Good Queen was a statute enacted in England, but Vermont had passed a law as early as 1821. A compilation of Massachusetts statutes in 1835 contains a provision against obscene literature, enacted at some previous date. Connecticut had a law as early as 1834.

The Federal statutes, as well, had taken cognizance of obscenity. By 1842 there had been enough traffic in indecent pictures and articles to warrant forbidding their importation into the United States, and in 1857 an amendment was added "more effectually to accomplish the Purposes for which that Provision was enacted." The transmission of books and pictures through the mail was prohibited by Congress in 1865.

The laws were on the statute books; but obscenity was

on the news-stands. To one country boy, painfully searching his soul in the long evenings in a Williamsburg boarding house, this was a burning wrong, a suppurating wound which cried for relief. Of all the ills of society—and we have seen that they were many—this seemed to him the most deplorable. Perhaps he did not believe the other fellows when they said they were going to Madame Vonderbush's or to pick up Cyprians on Broadway or to waste the evenings at oyster suppers. Perhaps he thought this was just youthful bravado. Undoubtedly, he was convinced that the evils of printed page and postcard were at the root of any desire for dissipation and revelry. Although Comstock's warnings were frequently directed against the sins of solitary meditation, of unbidden thought and lonely desire, he also took account of the more active and sociable vice to which such meditation may lead. He agreed with the good gentlemen of the Y.M.C.A. that the books and pictures which he so loyally hated were "feeders for brothels." In his book, *Frauds Exposed*, he wrote concerning the sale of erotic publications:

It is a deadly poison, cast into the fountain of moral purity. This business and intemperance are twins; but they are twin devils. Intemperance strikes down the flower of the land, openly and publicly. The bleared eye, the bloated face, and the reeling step, mark the drunkard's downfall. This cursed business of obscene literature works beneath the surface, and like a canker worm, secretly eats out the moral life and purity of our youth, and they droop and fade before their parents' eyes.

Again:

The effect of this cursed business on our youth and society, no pen can describe. It breeds lust. Lust defiles the body, debauches the imagination, corrupts the mind, deadens the will, destroys the memory, sears the conscience, hardens the heart, and damns the soul. It unnerves the arm, and steals away the elastic step. It robs the soul of manly virtues, and im-

prints upon the mind of the youth, visions that throughout life curse the man or woman. Like a panorama, the imagination seems to keep this hated thing before the mind, until it wears its way deeper and deeper, plunging the victim into practices that he loathes.

This traffic has made rakes and libertines in society—skeletons in many a household. The family is polluted, home desecrated, and each generation born into the world is more and more cursed by the inherited weakness, the harvest of this seed-sowing of the Evil one.

There are grounds for at least the suspicion that the man who wrote these passionate words had been overly impressed by those "lying advertisements" of the quacks whose activities he so vociferously deprecated. Certainly to Anthony Comstock, the prevention of the traffic in erotic literature was the panacea for all ills, including the destruction of memory, the unnerving of the arm, and the loss of the elastic step.

Trumbull tells us that the raw Connecticut boy, the green-horn shipping clerk, saw that many young men of his acquaintance were being demoralized by books and pictures. In 1868, a friend was "led astray and corrupted and diseased"—by a book, we are left to suppose. It was this occurrence which lashed young Comstock into action. He learned that the book-dealer from whom his friend had made his unhappy purchase was named Conroy. Bitterly he resolved that this man should pay for the harm he had done. He bought an erotic book from him as evidence. Then, accompanied by the police captain of the precinct, Comstock had Conroy arrested, and seized his stock of books and pictures. He did not forget this dealer who had wronged his friend. In 1874, when Conroy's knife slashed his cheek, Comstock was arresting him for the third time.

Meantime, those good gentlemen of the Young Men's Christian Association had not been idle. This organization

had found its work in New York mainly among men engaged in commercial pursuits, and the revelations of the depravity of clerks had not failed to impress the directors. Concerning the memorandum quoted above, William E. Dodge, junior—then president of the Association—had said, “The facts arrived at have been so startling as to awaken the greatest interest and surprise.” At the March meeting of the Board of Directors in 1866, it had been moved “that Messrs. Whitehead and Brainerd¹ proceed to Albany to secure the passage of the act of incorporation for the association, and also the passage of a saloon bill, and a bill on the suppression of obscene literature.” The last-named bill had been prepared and presented to the New York Legislature, but on the last day of the session, when action on it was expected, it had vanished from the table. The Young Men’s Christian Association was disappointed, but not discouraged. Through its efforts, the bill had eventually been passed in 1868, in time for Anthony Comstock to make his first arrest.

It was soon found, however, that the law was not sufficiently strong to put an end to erotic literature in New York. A few convictions were obtained. Several dealers were driven out of business. But by 1871 the traffic was more open than ever. With distressing memories of those findings of 1866, the Association resolved to push the prosecution of the offenders. But the process was a difficult and delicate one, requiring time and enthusiasm. So the good gentlemen of the Association hesitated. One day, Mr. Robert R. McBurney, the secretary, received a letter so impetuously scrawled in pencil that he could not find time to puzzle it out.

¹ Charles E. Whitehead and Cephas Brainerd. Both were leaders in the work of the Y. M. C. A. in New York.

Early in 1872 [Anthony Comstock was one day to relate] the appalling fact was revealed to me that there was an organized business, systematically carried on. . . . After making several arrests, I wrote a letter of appeal to Mr. McBurney at the Young Men's Christian Association, stating some of the facts which I had discovered, and asking for assistance. I was then a green country boy. I wrote my letter in pencil, and I wrote, I suppose, so hastily that Brother McBurney had hard work to make out the letter. As he was a busy man, he returned the letter to me to be re-written. Then he said he would bring it before his committee. In the meantime, however, Mr. Morris K. Jesup, who had become the president of the association, and whom I had never seen up to that time, happened to see this letter on Mr. McBurney's desk. He came to the store where I worked and I had a personal interview with him. As a result of that interview, Mr. Jesup invited me to meet Mr. McBurney and himself at his home on Madison Avenue. At that meeting, I disclosed the facts that I had discovered. I said I thought if I had a little money I could get at the stock of the publishers.

What was the story that Anthony Comstock told to Mr. Jesup and Mr. McBurney? There was the case of Simpson, one of the men whom he had had arrested in 1868. His stationery store had resumed the handling of erotic books, and now Comstock had had him arrested again. First, there had been some trouble. Before going into the store to secure his evidence, he had explained his intention to a patrolman; and, while the crusader was examining the price-list in the front of the store, the arm of the law was giving warning in the back. So it had been necessary to prefer charges at police headquarters, and have the patrolman dismissed from the force.

Certain newspapers had referred unfavorably to the activities of the New Englander; and the *Sunday Mercury* had said that, if young Comstock was the Christian man he professed to be, he could find plenty of such book-dealers

in Ann Street. Anthony had not failed to profit by this hint. Presently he had made seven more arrests, all in a single day. He had laid his plans carefully. Then, he had gone to the *New York Tribune* to ask that a reporter be assigned to accompany him. This request had been granted, and a sympathetic account of the arrests had appeared in the *Tribune*.

Some of the most notorious dealers in pornography had thus been driven out of business, but Comstock was far from satisfied. He wanted to destroy the root of the evil, the publishers themselves. So, in the intervals of his work of selling drygoods, he had managed to learn the names of four men who were responsible for the manufacture of no less than 165 different erotic books. They did a large and profitable business, and enjoyed the protection of the police.

The chief of these had been William Haynes, formerly an Irish surgeon. He had been in the publishing business in the United States since 1842, and was reputed to have written many of the books he published. Soon after Comstock began his investigations of the publishers, Haynes had received a message from a friend: "Get out of the way. Comstock is after you. Damn fool won't look at money." That same night, Haynes died—it was said by his own hand. Now Comstock wanted to buy the books and plates from his widow.

The morning after Comstock had told his story, Morris K. Jesup's check for six hundred and fifty dollars was in the mail. The green country boy had found the support he needed. Of courage and determination he had no lack, but the cash of the righteous was welcome. The day that Morris K. Jesup picked up a letter from Robert McBurney's desk was a golden day in Anthony Comstock's career. Jesup was a man of great wealth, keenly interested in

science and education—he was one of the founders of the American Museum of Natural History, and its president for more than a quarter of a century. But he had another hobby—the Puritan's penchant for knocking down sinners. Between this man and Comstock there was a strong bond of interest, respect and affection; and it was Jesup who secured for the boy from Connecticut the support of those Christian gentlemen without whom his work could scarcely have prospered.

The next step in Anthony's career was the appointment of a Committee for the Suppression of Vice by the Y.M.C.A. A society of that name, dedicated to a similar purpose, was already in existence in England, the fount and inspiration of all the uplift movements developed in the United States in the Nineteenth Century. There had been a trickle of comment in the press on the prevalence of the traffic in erotic literature. In the spring of 1872 such papers as the *New York Daily Witness* and the *American Messenger* were openly suggesting that some action should be brought against the unseemly publishers by the Young Men's Christian Association. But the Christian laymen made no reply to these taunts. They had shouldered their responsibility, but they were for proceeding quietly and with decorum. They had resolved—mark the phrase—"to engage in a still-hunt campaign against the business." Comstock's services had been secured, but he was to carry on the work without its being known under what ægis he fought. The gentlemen of the Y.M.C.A. were ready to provide the money—in less than two years they were to expend \$8,498.14 on this work—but the ignominy was to be Anthony's.

For, in spite of the fact that they deplored the depravity of numerous publications, they were not eager, those good people of the seventies, to mix themselves conspicuously with cleaning them up. It was not a popular job to which

young Comstock stretched out such willing hands. Late in May of 1872, he addressed his fellow teachers in a Brooklyn Sunday School on the subject of his campaign against purity. "Brethren," he concluded, "I know by the expression of your countenances that your sympathies are not with me in this work. But by the blessing of God I intend to persevere."

The young Christian was prepared for the enmity of the evil-doers. Was he bewildered at discovering the apathy and priggishness of the righteous? In his book, *Frauds Exposed*, he was later to tell the story of his work in 1872 when he set bravely out to destroy "the hydra-headed monster," obscenity. "I found laws inadequate, and public sentiment worse than dead," he wrote, "because of an appetite that had been formed for salacious reading; and especially because decent people could not be made to see or understand the necessity of doing anything in this line."

But decent people, though for the most part reluctant to have their names connected with the fight against obscenity, were with Anthony in spirit, and his earnestness and emotion could rally many to his cause. Even among the righteous, zealots are few. But Comstock's burning words kindled fires of pious indignation. He cared so deeply about the work he had chosen. In those early days he went to call on the Rev. John Hall, to ask his advice. The preacher scarcely knew the drygoods salesman who sat at his study table and told of his horror over the evils of pornography, with tears flowing from his eyes. But all his life he remembered the young man's fervor and sincerity.

This, then, was Anthony Comstock's essential difference from the mass of his fellowmen. He was a leader, and he cared more deeply than the others, was more cogently im-

pelled to translate his caring into action. His horror of sin, his conviction that purity of conduct should be forced upon the ungodly from without were part of the Puritan tradition of his countrymen. He was accused of persecution, and more than once the word seems apposite. But in extenuation it must be added that Comstock did not make the courts of law. He had no secret influence over the minds of prosecuting attorneys or judges. He might have remained a drygoods salesman all his life—still there would have been Judge Charles L. Benedict, in whose court Comstock claimed that he never lost a case. Still, there would have been Judge Daniel Clark of Boston, and many others, especially in the Federal courts, who bitterly opposed obscenity. Such judges ruled that books could be condemned in part, without considering them as a whole. They permitted indictments charging that certain books were too obscene to be placed upon the records of the court—a procedure whereby the decision is taken completely out of the jury's hands. The New York *World* of March 27, 1879, in an editorial on the trial of D. M. Bennett, said, "The tendency of Federal judges since the war has been to usurp the functions of the jury." Finally, in the courts was evolved the definition of obscenity which was used to secure so many convictions in questionable cases—anything having a tendency to suggest impure and libidinous thoughts to the young and inexperienced.

Outside his connection with prosecutions and arrests, Anthony Comstock has been widely execrated for the part he took in framing the laws against obscenity, especially the postal legislation which he was instrumental in having passed in 1873. Here, again, he did not act alone. He was financed by the gentlemen of his committee, and their influence had probably as large a share in the result as Anthony's lobbying. Then, credit must not be entirely withheld from the

members of Congress, who viewed his exhibits of books and pictures with enough alarm to cast their votes on behalf of purity. Moreover, no discussion of the responsibility for the Federal anti-obscenity laws should fail to take account of the fact that Comstock's was not the first, though it was far more effective than preceding legislation. We have already noted that in 1865 a law prohibiting the carrying of obscene publications by mail had been passed by Congress, and this had been amended in June, 1872.

In the popular imagination, Comstock has often figured as a man who by some devilish control over the legislators was able to secure laws which were tyrannical and unconstitutional, an interference with personal liberty. Yet, granting that such was his earnest intention, it seems too much to ascribe to him all the credit for the performance. The wider powers which the Federal Government had possessed in war-time had survived the crisis, and the law passed in 1865, when Comstock had barely been mustered out of service, was an example of this tendency to centralization. Moreover, the Jeffersonian theory of the autonomy of the State was lost in the submergence of the Democratic Party in the years following the Civil War.

So much for the forces at work before Comstock came upon the scene. A discussion of later tendencies to interference with the liberties of the individual has no place here. In a wide and growing curve, over the frenzied protests of the adherents of Jefferson, the tendency toward centralization has grown. The lottery laws, the Mann Act, the Pure Food Act, the Narcotics Act, the Prohibition Amendment—in these can it be suggested that the obscure dry-goods salesman who went crusading against impurity played any part?

Anthony Comstock was adapted to the folkways of his time and place. Often in the fight against obscenity he

stood alone. Always he was in the van. But somewhere behind him an army of Puritans was solidly massed. For this reason, he was feared and hated—because he was so strong. Had his crusade run counter to the *mores* of his people, he would have been a pitiful figure, a martyr to his lonely ideal. But in him people cursed the spirit of enforced righteousness made palpable—fleshly and menacing, with ginger-colored whiskers and a warrant and a Post Office badge. He was the apotheosis, the fine flower of Puritanism.

At the trial of D. M. Bennett for the circulation of obscene literature, Assistant District Attorney William P. Fiero thus addressed the jury: "Now, gentlemen, this case is not entitled 'Anthony Comstock against D. M. Bennett'; this case is not entitled 'The Society for the Suppression of Vice against D. M. Bennett.' Yes, it is. It is the United States against D. M. Bennett, and the United States is one great society for the suppression of vice."

M. L.

CHAPTER VII

BEECHER AND THE LADY BROKERS

THE Christian laymen had had in mind a still-hunt campaign, but they had picked the wrong lieutenant. To Comstock the phrase must have seemed a strange one, and possibly he never troubled about its interpretation. He would have been glad to write across the skies in letters of fire that he was about his Father's business.

For the conference which was to result in the appointment of a committee from the Y.M.C.A., Morris K. Jesup had assembled an impressive group in the plush chairs of his dim Madison Avenue parlors. Many Doctors of Divinity were present, as well as representatives of the Christian merchants, including William E. Dodge, senior, and his son of the same name. To these gentlemen, so Christian and so eminent, Mr. Comstock told his story. He told about the seven arrests which he had made in company with the *Tribune* reporter. He told about the four publishers, of whom one, Haynes, was dead.

But there had been further developments since he had talked with Mr. Jesup and Mr. McBurney, and these he related, too. There had, for example, been the matter of a most timely and helpful Voice, which had whispered in his ear one morning, as he walked toward the Brooklyn ferry. He was on his way to business—that increasingly neglected business of selling drygoods—but the counsel of the Voice was that he should proceed instead to Balchen Place, the address of the late publisher, Dr. Haynes. For a moment

he hesitated. But, as was usual with this man, inner promptings won the victory over expediency. He had not sat long with Mrs. Haynes in her parlor, when the virtue of that Voice was made manifest. Her startled glances toward the window furnished the first clue. An express wagon, piled high with stereotype plates, was backing to the door. Here, indeed, was proof of Divine guidance! Comstock rushed from the house. While the driver stood on the curb, the farm boy dashed for his seat. He could manage a team of horses with the best of them; and soon the plates which had been used in publishing the surgeon's obscene books were triumphantly unloaded at the nearest Y.M.C.A.—later to be destroyed under Anthony's personal supervision.

Of the money which Mr. Jesup had given him, Comstock had taken \$450 to reimburse Mrs. Haynes for these plates, which were valued at more than \$30,000. He had also secured and destroyed the entire stock of the books which Haynes had published.

Three weeks after presenting these facts to the Doctors of Divinity and the Christian merchants, Comstock again did his stuff in the dim Jesup parlors. This time he met the newly appointed Committee for the Suppression of Vice, and exhibited to them specimens of the books and plates he had seized. According to the *New York Tribune* for May 29, 1872, he made some startling exposures of prominent persons, "on whom the breath of suspicion has not heretofore lighted." The committee presented him with a purse of \$500 in token of their appreciation. In his diary Comstock wrote that God's hand was in this.

To the young salesman, impoverished and obscure, it must have seemed God's hand indeed. This friendly gesture of Deity inspired him to still more vigorous efforts. Haynes and his evil books had gone where the wicked cease from troubling, but the other publishers remained. Of these, one

Ackerman was responsible for numerous evil titles, and this was a desperate man, a hard man to find. In his search for him, Comstock was obliged to trail through dark Brooklyn streets a nervous ex-convict of so suspicious a nature that Anthony was forced to the expedient of reeling behind him in the manner of one helplessly intoxicated. Anthony proved himself a good actor. He got his man and the information he wanted; and at length, in a hotel on the corner of Nassau and Beekman Streets, he met Ackerman, garbed as an Episcopal clergyman. He was a cunning fox, that Ackerman, but not so wily as the hunter who pursued him. He recognized that escape was hopeless, and presently he delivered to Comstock his large stock of plates, woodcuts, French playing cards, and books.

There was a third publisher, Farrell, who fled South to escape the long arm of Comstock's retribution. In two weeks, he was dead; and shortly after he relinquished his stock, Ackerman, too, had died. With Haynes, three of the erring publishers were gone, and late in June the *Christian Weekly*, hailing Mr. Comstock as a "single-hearted, determined, indefatigable Christian man," called attention to this series of fatalities in the following terms: "It is a fact of strange impressiveness that three of the principal publishers and manufacturers, who were engaged in this vile business, have since their detection been called from the earthly tribunal before the Great Judge to give up their account."

During this period, Comstock was to record two other propitious deaths. An expressman engaged in the transportation of certain obscene stocks and a manufacturer of indecent rubber goods were both cut off, shortly after their paths crossed that of the reformer. All five of these fatalities were announced in Comstock's public addresses, and were included in the statistics of his accomplishments which

he issued to the press. It is startling to observe, listed with figures for obscene books destroyed and stereotype plates broken, the item:

Expressman dead I

For all his obscurity, he had from the first been able to make the public mind aware of him and of his activities. This was a man who throughout his long life was able to command the interest, if not the favor of the press. The New York *Tribune*, which had delegated a reporter to accompany him in making those seven arrests, had taken early notice of his work, editorially deprecating the increased circulation of obscene books and pictures, and calling attention to the young salesman's arrests of several notorious purveyors of "these baits of the Devil."

In other papers, too, there had been comment, but outside the religious press—among such organs the *Christian Weekly* claimed the honor of first breaking "the ice of reserve"—it had been for the most part unsympathetic. Comstock had aroused antagonism by his zeal in securing the dismissal of a patrolman. Early in 1872 he had established for himself a reputation for espionage and interference.

But in the fall of that same year, we find the name of the drygoods salesman conspicuously mingled with the details of a front-page news story. When we read the accounts of the Woodhull and Claflin trial, it seems absurd that a little more than a year later, the Y.M.C.A. will contend that their agent has had "little publicity" in his work. For in this case, Comstock projected himself into a controversy which was to prove sufficiently acrimonious—a controversy which is passed over in glacial silence in the Y.M.C.A. report of his activities, and in the pages of his official biographer, Trumbull. Surely no stranger destinies

ever became entangled than those of Anthony Comstock and the sisters, Victoria C. Woodhull and Tennessee Claflin.

These were, even against the blatant background of that raucous New York of the seventies, two amazing people. That they were women made their behavior a matter for scandal in a period which, for all its lawlessness and vulgarity, still kept sacred the shrine of woman's purity and her consequent subservience to a binding decorum. In November, 1872, when Comstock caused their arrest, Mrs. Woodhull, the older of the two by seven years, was thirty-four. The blue-eyed Tennessee was beautiful, but Victoria had some rare fascination which made her an acknowledged leader. Of her, Theodore Tilton had written, "If the women's movement has a Joan of Arc, it is this gentle, but fiery genius." Married at fourteen, she had secured a divorce at twenty-eight. She was an ardent spiritualist, a passionate supporter of women's rights, and an advocate of free love.

Before coming to New York, the sisters had had a varied and eventful career, including a cure-all sanitarium which for a time they operated in Indiana. Arriving in the metropolis at the height of the wild railroad speculation, they opened a brokerage office in Broad Street, where they attracted no little notice—earning for themselves such titles as "The Fascinating Financiers," "The Lady Brokers," "The Future Princesses of Erie," and "Commodore Vanderbilt's Protégés." In addition to their financial operations, they soon engaged on another enterprise. With money said to have been supplied by Commodore Vanderbilt, they established "a radical reformatory paper," called *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*. This sheet of sixteen pages, carrying a quantity of financial advertising and heavily sprinkled with references to the hand of Providence and the guidance of the angel world, became the organ of their views on the limi-



This cartoon from the New York "Evening Telegram" of February 18, 1870, shows Victoria Woodhull and Tennessee Claflin seated in a chariot drawn by two bulls and two bears, whose faces caricature contemporary financiers. Tennessee is holding the reins, while Victoria vigorously wields the whip.



A famous triangle of the seventies was composed of Henry Ward Beecher (right), his brilliant protégé, Theodore Tilton (left), and the latter's wife, Elizabeth (center).

tations of women, and pled for the political and social equality of the sexes.

As the opinions of the sisters became a matter of common knowledge, the admiring appellations which had at first been bestowed upon them were frequently replaced by others less flattering. They had reason to complain of such epithets as "humbugs," "political harlequins," "public nuisances," and even "prostitutes," "harlots," and "blackmailers." On their own statement, they were regarded with such disfavor that they were at length forced to leave the hotel in which they lived. Unable to find living quarters, they were for some time forced to sleep on the floor of the Broad Street office. But finally they solved the problem by taking a fine house on Murray Hill, which they shared with their mother and one Colonel James H. Blood, formerly commander of the 6th Missouri Regiment, now managing editor of the *Weekly* and Victoria's husband.

In spite of public disapproval, the sisters' spirit was untamed. Many stories have been told of their escapades. In those days women were not allowed in restaurants, unless accompanied by men; and it is related that Tennessee, when refused service on entering Delmonico's alone, brought in her cab driver as a dinner companion. In May of 1872, at a national convention of reformers of all schools, held in New York, Victoria Woodhull was put in nomination as the candidate of the Equal Rights Party for President of the United States. This "little woman with the far-off look," as one of her admirers called her, was an eloquent and magnetic public speaker. She it was who presented the views of the Women's Rights Association before the House Judiciary Committee in Washington—while such women as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton stood by, listening.

But by the fall of 1872, the good ladies of the Women's

Rights Association had withdrawn their skirts from Mrs. Woodhull and Miss Claflin. There had evidently been friction, for Mrs. Woodhull complained that Miss Anthony had called her a blackmailer and had accused her of slandering certain of the woman suffrage advocates. The opinion persisted that, aside from their dubious views, there was something decidedly irregular about the fascinating sisters. This impression must have been strengthened when, about three months after Victoria had so ably presented the case for woman suffrage in Washington, her mother hailed Colonel Blood into court, contending that he had threatened her life. It was then discovered that Dr. Woodhull was also living in the house with his ex-wife. In vain Victoria offered explanations. Her former husband was ill. It was duty, it was virtue to succor him. The story had gone the rounds, and two husbands under the same roof clearly gave cause for scandal.

Concerning the double standard, Victoria Woodhull (as she continued to call herself) was growing all the while more bitterly indignant. As criticism and hostility were visited on her, she became increasingly resolved that she should not suffer alone. "I do not intend," she wrote in that florid, oratorical style of hers, "to be made the scape-goat of sacrifice to be offered up as a victim to society by those who cover over the foulness of their lives and the feculence of their thoughts with a hypocritical mantle of fair profession, and by diverting public attention from their own iniquity in pointing the finger at me." She had laid plans to make certain exposures in the pages of the *Weekly*. Financial difficulties and illness, however, prevented the appearance of that unpunctual sheet from June until November of 1872. But when she prepared the issue of November 2, Victoria was as good as her word. She flung a bomb or two.

In looking over the facts, it becomes clear that this woman had for some time been in possession of a piece of gossip. She was aching to tell. The gossip was a particularly savory bit. It concerned no less a person than that eminent Congregationalist preacher, the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher. For more than two years, there had been faint but persistent whispers in Brooklyn and New York concerning his relations with the wife of Theodore Tilton, a brilliant young writer who had been a protégé and close friend of Beecher.

For a later day it may be hard to recapture a sense of the respect and veneration in which the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher was held in 1870, when the breath of scandal first dimmed his name. A man of commanding presence and great magnetism, a speaker of masterly eloquence, his sermons drew crowds every Sunday to Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, of which he was pastor. His writings, too, had a wide popularity, and his services as a lecturer were in constant demand. During the Civil War, he had lectured in England on behalf of the Union, and is credited with having done much to prevent the recognition of the Confederacy by that country. In political affairs he had long been a leader as a prominent Republican and anti-slavery advocate.

Though rumor had been busy with the good dominie's name, his great prestige sustained him. Even after Mrs. Woodhull had, in her own phrase, "ventilated the scandal," he continued to go about, praying and preaching, as before. He made no public denial of the charges. He simply ignored them. In spite of the notoriety which followed Victoria's disclosures, the majority of his parishioners remained faithful to him. Theodore Tilton was still technically a member of Plymouth Church; and, after a stormy series of events, the church was excluded from the Congregational Council. For all Mr. Beecher's ignoring, the trouble would not die down. At length, in 1874, he was

forced to appoint a committee to examine into the rumors respecting his conduct, and this committee, after investigation, exonerated Mr. Beecher, in the face of Tilton's sworn affidavit affirming the preacher's guilt. Shortly after, Tilton brought suit for one hundred thousand dollars against Mr. Beecher for alienation of his wife's affections. The case was tried in Brooklyn in 1875, the testimony covering three thousand pages. After more than six months' duration, attended by sensational publicity, the trial ended in a disagreement, the jury having disputed for nine days.

Plymouth Church still stood behind its pastor, and Beecher's wife and friends did not fail him. Still every Sunday his eloquence drew great crowds. He continued to take part in politics and, accompanied by his wife, he made a triumphal visit to England. At the time the scandal broke, he was fifty-nine years old, and he was destined to survive that ordeal for fifteen years. In spite of the apparently overwhelming evidence against him, it cannot be conclusively said whether or not the great Congregationalist preacher sinned. The question of his relations with Mrs. Tilton is a page of almost forgotten history. But in the seventies it was a bitterly disputed issue. His was a mighty personality that could breast the storm of so much scandal, and not be struck down.

These, then, were the beans that Victoria Woodhull saw fit to spill in the fall of 1872. It was not her first attempt to expose Mr. Beecher, though it was by far the most successful. She had been hinting about his conduct for some time. She had even given an interview on the subject to a reporter, but no newspaper cared to touch the story. It was said that Tilton, for some time her intimate friend—the *Chicago Times* was to quote her as declaring that he had been her lover—had persuaded her to repress the information on several occasions. But by the time the story appeared

in the *Weekly Tilton* seems to have faded from Mrs. Woodhull's life.

Early that fall she had gone to Boston to attend the annual convention of the National Association of Spiritualists, of which this gentle, but fiery genius was the president. When she arose to address the convention, she was, in her own words "seized with an overwhelming gust of inspiration," and she proceeded to tell the story of the Beecher-Tilton scandal "in a rhapsody of indignant eloquence." This apparently extraneous discourse she connected with the convention by announcing in prophetic tones the bearing which the scandal was to have on the future of spiritualism; and she later declared that the spirit of Theodore Parker must have moved her to speak. In spite of the fact that she admitted using "some naughty words" in her speech, the spiritualists re-elected her president, over her earnest protest.

One of the spiritualists, Mrs. E. A. Meriwether, gave in the *Memphis Appeal* for November 17, 1872, a graphic account of this startling occasion. According to this witness, on Victoria's appearance,

A sort of electric shock swept over the assembly; striking it to a dead stillness, as if awaiting a thunder clap. . . . Mrs. Woodhull tossed back her hair, in high tragic style, and poured out a torrent of flame. It made our flesh to creep and our blood to run cold. . . . Her features are delicate and clear-cut, the nose slightly aquiline. Her skin, smooth and pale, except when under the excitement of speaking, then two crimson spots burn on her cheeks, and in her eyes is a lurid light. . . . When speaking, she has all the action and fervor of a tragic actress. . . . Her face, the saddest I ever saw, tells of wrecked hopes and a cruel battle with life.

According to Mrs. Meriwether, Victoria's speech was not obscene, but "fiercely denunciatory, fiery and scandalous."

After she had denounced Mr. Beecher, asserting that such men as he claimed the right to cast stones on her, a curious incident occurred.

In the most impassioned accents [runs Mrs. Meriwether's account], she demanded if there was a single immaculate being in that hall, he should rise to his feet and cast on her the stones! Whereupon, right in the middle of the hall, up from the dense crowd, a forlorn, seedy-looking fellow, with a small carpet-bag in his hand, rose to his feet, and every eye was turned on him. Mrs. Woodhull paused, and for a moment surveyed the forlorn figure, claiming to be immaculate. Perhaps she thought he had the stones in his carpet-bag. . . .

The audience greeted him with laughter, then with hisses and howls, and at length the champion of purity cowered down in his seat, and Mrs. Woodhull continued her speech.

The Boston papers suppressed all account of the scandal. Frustrated in various efforts to unmask Mr. Beecher in the press, Victoria spared no words when she produced the *Weekly* for November 2, 1872. She announced that she spoke reluctantly, out of a deep sense of duty, as part of her campaign against the outworn institution of marriage. Her exposure of the eminent divine occupied eleven and a half double-measure columns of fine type.

Theodore Tilton was given as Victoria's authority for most of the facts of the case. But she stated that she had also talked with his wife, Elizabeth Tilton. She had even interviewed Mr. Beecher himself and received from the preacher the assurance that marriage was the grave of love. Moreover, Victoria declared, she had had confirmation of the fact from two leaders of the woman's movement, Paulina Wright Davis and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in whom the Tiltons had confided. .

According to Mrs. Woodhull's story, Theodore Tilton had been convinced of the intimacy between his wife and

her pastor by the story told him by his little daughter on his return from a long lecture tour in the West. Certain half-formed suspicions were confirmed and soon Elizabeth Tilton confessed all to her husband. In a transport of jealousy and rage, he tore the wedding ring from his wife's finger, and stamped to pieces a photograph of Mr. Beecher. So violent was his conduct that Elizabeth, then several months with child, was shocked into a miscarriage—and concerning the probable paternity of this infant Tilton expressed himself freely.

Mrs. Woodhull's colorful account of the affair was interpolated with references to Mr. Beecher's "demanding physical nature" and his "immense physical potency." Concerning this aspect of the case, she continued, "The amative impulse is the physiological basis of character. It is this which emanates zest and magnetic power to his whole audience through the organism of the great preacher. Plymouth Church has lived and fed, and the healthy vigor of public opinion for the last quarter of a century has been augmented and strengthened from the physical amateness of Henry Ward Beecher." In short, Victoria expressed herself as completely satisfied with the alleged conduct of Mr. Beecher and Mrs. Tilton. Only with the hypocrisy of the eminent divine did she quarrel. With Theodore Tilton she was out of sympathy. His life, she pointed out, had been no better than Mr. Beecher's, and his display of wounded feelings and pride was inexcusable, caused by "*bogus sentimentality, pumped* in his imagination, because our sickly religious literature, and Sunday School morality, and pulpit phariseism had humbugged him all his life into the belief that *he ought to feel and act* in this harlequin and absurd way on such an occasion."

So much for Mrs. Woodhull's article on Mr. Beecher. There was another reputation assaulted in the issue of the

Weekly for November 2. One Luther C. Challis, a broker, was accused by the two sisters of having slandered them; and, proceeding on the high moral grounds that male debauchery must be exposed, an article on the conduct of Mr. Challis followed the Beecher story. The substance of this article was that Mr. Challis had at the French Ball accomplished the seduction of two young maidens, and subsequently boasted of it.

Now the pages of the *Weekly* must have been anathema to Anthony, and likewise the conduct and the views of the two fascinating creatures who guided its destinies. The issue of November 2 was the last straw. It contained slander, and to the reformer this seemed obscenity. He was busy at once. First he preferred a suit in the State courts, but the district attorney refused to proceed, drawing from Comstock dark insinuations of venality. He next brought his charges under that Federal statute of June 8, 1872, which contained a provision against mailing an obscene publication.

On November 2—although the issue of the *Weekly* bore that date, it had actually been published several days earlier—two deputy United States marshals appeared at the *Weekly* office. The sisters were out; but on Broad Street the marshals presently encountered a carriage containing Victoria and Tennessee, dressed alike—according to their custom—in black with purple bows. The sisters were later to complain that when they invited one of the officers to take a seat in their carriage, he misunderstood their courtesy to the extent of plumping himself in their laps.

A curious crowd from the financial district soon gathered at the office of the *Weekly*. High humor was the keynote of the occasion. "The wildest rumors were current," reported the New York *Telegram*, "and puns, jokes and witticisms were freely indulged in at the expense of each other, the police, the prisoners and the United States Government,

and many a hearty laugh indulged in as a fresh sally was heard."

Meantime, the lady brokers drove to the office of Commissioner Osborne, before whom they were arraigned, while dense crowds packed the room and overflowed into the corridor. The *New York Dispatch* for November 3, 1872, described the appearance of the prisoners:

They were dressed in plain dark suits of alpaca, and wore hats of the most jaunty style. Tennie was flushed like a rose, and her blue eyes sparkled nervously. As she glanced round the room, a smile of contempt seemed to gather about her ruby lips. She has splendid teeth, and takes care to show them. In fact, Tennie is a pretty-looking young woman, round-faced, with well-cut features, and bright, animated expression. Her sister, Mrs. Woodhull, is rather more sedate in appearance, and of a less lovely turn. Both converse continually with their counsel, Counselor W. F. Howe. Mr. Howe looked in his glory. His face seemed as fresh as a peach, and the glister of diamonds was like the gleaming rays of the sun.

Although the charge was that of sending obscene matter through the mails, the assistant district attorney saw fit to refer to the offense in terms of "an atrocious, abominable and untrue libel on a gentleman whom the whole country reveres." Questions of libel and of the esteem in which Mr. Beecher was held were, of course, alike irrelevant to the case for the United States; and it is interesting that the prosecution should at the outset have connected itself with the defaming of the Congregationalist preacher. Possibly the furor created by the aspersion of Mr. Beecher's reputation prevented a realization of how weak was the charge of obscenity, once it had been divorced from emotional consideration of the ethics and taste involved in publishing the story. The Challis article, while somewhat more frank, was likewise a poor support for Comstock's case. Concern-

ing the two most startling words contained in it, "token" and "virginity," the lady brokers asserted with some justice that neither could be called obscene. It is little wonder that the prosecution made several changes of front, now asserting that the arrests were made on account of the Challis article, now that the entire paper was obscene. It is apparent that the first wave of indignation had been caused by the affront to Mr. Beecher.

That victim of Mrs. Woodhull's righteous anger offered, as has been said, neither protest nor denial. But Luther C. Challis—later to hear himself referred to in the courtroom as "this poisoned Challis," asserted that the sisters had tried to blackmail him, and speedily instituted a criminal suit for libel which included Colonel Blood, as managing editor of the *Weekly*. On the day of the sisters' arrest, Colonel Blood was cast into Jefferson Market Prison.

Bail for the sisters was fixed at \$8,000 apiece, and they took up their quarters in Ludlow Street Jail, declaring that they preferred to remain independent and refuse the offers of their friends. Pending their examination, the Grand Jury found indictments against them, and the case could not be heard in open court. Counselor Howe—of the well-known law firm of Howe and Hummel—declared that a blow was being struck at the freedom of the press, and that the Bible, Byron and Shakespeare should share the fate of the suppressed issue of the *Weekly*; and the lady brokers drove back to the Ludlow Street Jail. They bitterly proclaimed the injustice of their arrest and imprisonment, and asserted that in their absence their brokerage office and their house were unlawfully invaded by the police, who seized private letters and rifled their trunks. But, aside from their fundamental wrongs, they were to find that durance was not so vile. They later reported that they had been pleased

with their quarters in the jail, that they had received polite attentions from all the officers, and that during their entire incarceration they did not hear an oath or a vulgar word.

Meantime, rumors of blackmail continued to circulate, and Luther C. Challis announced that he would spend a hundred thousand dollars to secure the conviction of the sisters and Colonel Blood. Victoria and Tennessee were to remain in Ludlow Street for four weeks without a trial, but the examination of Colonel Blood was presently held, and its details furnished fresh scenes for "the sensational comedy of free love," as the New York *Herald* styled the case. The courtroom was packed with people. The newspapers were striped with long descriptive columns. It was a good show. There were the lovely and shocking sisters, the gallant Colonel, the resplendent Counselor Howe, the mad-dened Challis, and that grim nemesis from the drygoods world, Anthony Comstock. Even in the vulgar charivari which was New York in the seventies, it was a very good show indeed.

A cheerful old gentleman, with a pointed beard of russet gray, turned out to be the father of the lady brokers. He declared he had warned his daughters that the Challis article would get them in trouble; but Colonel Blood had told him to shut his venerable mouth. His testimony caused some consternation among the prisoners, and Tennessee played with her gloves, her cheeks burning red.

Mr. Challis was questioned concerning a gift of undergarments to Miss Claflin. The developments of the examination must have brought new frenzy to that already frantic broker. In retaliation for his charges of blackmail, Mrs. Woodhull asserted on the witness stand that he had tried to bribe her and Tennessee to retract the statements contained in the *Weekly*. And Laura Cuppy Smith, a friend of the sisters—appearing in dark green, with a scarlet neck-

tie—testified that she had seen the unfortunate broker kiss Tennie and tell her she was “looking charming.”

Such reports as these starred the press with color, but the examination of the fascinating financiers was still deferred. Murmurs of complaint rose from editorial columns. The Brooklyn *Eagle* protested against the delay in the proceedings, against the involving of a Federal statute in a local issue, and against “the irresponsible action of the more zealous than sensible Comstock.” For this, the *Daily Witness* had, on November 22, a sharp reply. The *Eagle*, according to the *Daily Witness*, was taking anything but a respectable stand in ranging itself with obscene literature against Mr. Anthony Comstock. The *Eagle* was not slow to answer. “If money could impart brains to the New York *Witness*,” it scathingly retorted, “the expenditure of two cents for a copy of that paper would be more justifiable than at present. Even after the brains had been imparted, the downright wickedness and hypocrisy of that paper would remain. Everybody has long known that the *Witness* is stupid beyond comparison.” The charge that it was allied with obscene literature had pierced the *Eagle* to the quick. “We denounced obscene literature and we denounce stupid literature,” the editorial continued. “That brings *Woodhull and Claflin’s Weekly* and the *Witness* both under the ban. As to Mr. Anthony Comstock, we never heard of him till he ‘ranged himself’ in legal company with the Claflin Sisters as their prosecutor and world-wide advertiser. Even then we never referred to him, for the same reason that we do not refer to last year’s flies—he is entirely unimportant.”

On December 4, Victoria and Tennessee resolved to obtain bail and, after some difficulties, at last found themselves formally at liberty. Their month in jail had won them sympathy in certain quarters. Their behavior was disgraceful, their views were scandalous, but, after all—they were

such attractive creatures. Four weeks in jail without a trial? The thing smelled of persecution. However the public might disapprove of the sisters, it had no affection in its heart for the man who had caused their imprisonment. There was a widespread opinion that he was acting from some ulterior motive, that he was actually Beecher's agent in the case.

He had had opposition before, this Comstock. Even in his short career of hunting vice, he had learned to expect antagonism. But this time laughter crackled through the outbursts of indignation against his cause. People seemed to find the whole thing vastly entertaining. Newspaper reporters with a bent for humor were permitted wide latitude in indulging it.

How could people laugh at creatures so odious, so degraded as Woodhull and Claflin? There was even a pretense that they should be treated with some consideration. When Comstock was testifying during the examination of Colonel Blood, he had occasion to refer to Miss Claflin. He spoke of her as an "individual." Counselor Howe, in a brilliant Scotch plaid waistcoat, sprang up to inform the judge that when he represented a lady in a court of law, he would like to have her treated as such!

It was a very trying case. But Comstock was determined to see justice done. Dour, irascible, he stalked through the disreputable scene, a Puritan at the circus. What place was this for an earnest Christian drygoods salesman? He must have been upheld and strengthened by a conviction that it was his high duty to bring confusion on the partisans of what he liked to call "free lust."

M. L.

CHAPTER VIII

PURITAN IN THE SPOTLIGHT

THE two sisters had been released on bail. But the publicity which their imprisonment had occasioned was by no means ended. A new arrest was the next sensation. The arm of the law now gestured toward that eccentric fellow, George Francis Train. Through his association with the woman's movement he had known the sisters for some time; and Mrs. Woodhull wrote that he, immediately on their arrest, "like a true knight errant flew to our side as a champion."

This knight errant was one of the extraordinary figures of his day. He was a man of great ability. At the age of twenty, he had attained a notable position in the shipping business, at a salary of \$10,000 a year—a considerable figure in 1849. He created a fleet of forty sailing ships. He acquired 5,000 lots in Omaha, said to have been worth \$30,000,000. He introduced street railways into Europe. He projected the Union Pacific Railway, and organized the *Crédit Mobilier* to finance it—though he was not implicated in the scandals with which that gigantic venture was tainted.

In 1872, he was a man of forty-three, possessed of considerable wealth, with a famous show place at Newport. Handsome, with a magnetic personality, he might have carried everything before him. Having paid a visit to France during the Second Empire, he had been on cordial

terms with Louis Napoléon and the Empress Eugénie; and the Queen of Spain was also among his friends. But his communistic views and his eccentric habits of thought and behavior were constantly leading him into strange adventures. In earlier years, while taking a trip around the world, he had been offered the presidency of Australia by the discontented miners of that colony, who had projected a revolution. In 1870, anticipating—and, by his own claim, inspiring—Jules Verne, he had gone around the world in eighty days. While in France after this trip he had organized the Marseille Commune, known as the “Ligue du Midi.” Returning to the United States, he announced himself as an independent candidate for the presidency in the campaign of 1872, in which Grant and Greeley were the main contestants. He later, however, concluded that the post of dictator was more desirable.

Early in November of 1872, Train was making a speech from the steps of a Wall Street bank, when a newspaper was thrust into his hand, and he learned that Mrs. Woodhull and Miss Claflin had been arrested at the instance of Anthony Comstock. His response to this new cause was immediate. In a cheering message, he assured the sisters that the language used in the *Weekly* was grand, and the truths were eternal. Another note offered to go their bail, adding, “I am satisfied the cowardly Christian community will destroy you, if possible, to cover up the rotten state of society.” He became a frequent visitor at Ludlow Street, scrawling on the wall of the sisters’ cell one of his characteristic couplets, which denounced the baseness of the attack on their reputations. At the examination of Colonel Blood, he was a conspicuous figure, with his curly gray locks arranged in what the *Herald* reported as “a distractingly talented manner.” He declared that he had never approved of the sisters’ free love doctrines. In the woman suffrage movement, he had often

been antagonistic to them. But in adversity, he was their friend.

Unable to get a public hall in which to proclaim his sympathy for the lady brokers, Train proceeded to publish an issue of a newspaper, which he called *The Train Ligue*. In this he repeated certain of the statements included in the proscribed number of the *Weekly*—purposely exaggerating them, in an effort to get himself arrested as a test case. He also vociferously demanded the prosecution of the Bible Publishing Company for printing “disgusting slanders on Lot, Abraham, Solomon and David.” But Comstock did not rise to the bait. Train was forced to further efforts. He issued another number of *The Train Ligue*, containing certain outspoken sections of the Old Testament, printed under sensational headlines. Our crusader, returning from a Western trip, was aroused to action by this new and blasphemous offense. The Federal authorities refused to proceed in the case; but from the State courts, so delinquent with regard to the *Weekly*, Comstock was this time able to obtain an indictment, and the knight errant was thrown into the Tombs.

New inspiration was afforded to the representatives of the press; and accounts of Train’s prison fare, his epigrams, his long sealskin overcoat, and the flower in his button-hole ranked high in the news of the day. This was surely a willing victim—he refused to give bail, declaring that he was entirely guilty, that the liberty of the press was at stake, that two thousand newspapers would fall with his, and that the mob of the Commune would tear down the Tombs within thirty days. Incarceration was, moreover, no novelty to this quixotic soul, who was in later years fond of saying that he had been fifteen times in jail without a crime. But the *Daily Witness*, ever faithful to Comstock, fondly commented on his cleverness in effecting the capture.

(Below) An illustration from "Frank Leslie's" of February 4, 1871, shows Victoria Woodhull presenting the case of the Women's Rights Association before the House Judiciary Committee in Washington. Tennessee appears in the left foreground.



George Francis Train first met the sisters through his interest in the cause of women's rights. The photograph shown above appeared in a circular announcing Train as "The People's Candidate for President" in 1872.



The arrest of Victoria and Tennessee on November 2, 1872, is represented in a drawing contained in a pamphlet, "One Moral Standard for All." As the lady brokers alight from their carriage, a United States marshal serves the warrant.

Train wished to plead guilty to the charge of obscenity—adding to his plea the words, “based on extracts from the Bible.” But the court refused to permit a conditional plea, and directed “Not Guilty” to be entered. Of this occasion, the *Sun* for December 23, 1872, reported: “Mr. Train did not walk in with moody air and cautious tread, like an ordinary prisoner. He rushed in like a modern Achilles, his face lit up, his eyes bright and resolute, and his whole bearing indicative of soul-set determination.” He was attended by a woman in a long dress, with “manly hat and hair,” who waved a silken banner which she called the rainbow flag of the new government, of which Train was to be dictator.

In his cell in the Tombs, the prospective dictator cordially received the representative of the *Sun*, and gave him an outline of his plans. With the establishment of the Commune, he would hang, first, the murderers; second, the thieves; third, the leading politicians; fourth, an editor or two; and fifth, Congress. He gave out a copy of some verses, signed “Champion of the People.” That night he dined on prison stew and pronounced it excellent. His cell was on “Murderers’ Row,” and twenty-two of the “murderers” formed a club and elected Train president.

On the basis that he was mentally unbalanced, two doctors were appointed to examine him. Their report declared that he was “of unsound mind, though harmless”; and this description he adopted as an appendage to his signature in issuing his frequent bulletins, which were subsequently printed in *Woodhull and Claflin’s Weekly*, under the head, “Hark! From the Tombs.” Continuing in his refusal to give bail, he stayed in the Tombs for fourteen weeks, suffering from the bad air and general insalubrity of that institution, and at every opportunity loudly voicing his disgust at such conditions. He earnestly wanted to be tried on the

charge of obscenity. The authorities, however, were reluctant to make an issue of his case. They were clearly anxious to be rid of "this dreadful person," as the *Times* editorially termed him, adding that for months he "obstructed business, distracted judges, and made a travesty of justice, uttering his vaporings and trumpeting." Frequently he was left alone in the courthouse and in prison corridors. But George Francis Train had resolved to be a prisoner, and a prisoner he remained.

At length, in the spring of 1873, his endurance was rewarded. He was brought to trial, and there began those hearings styled by the appreciative press "the Train matinéés." In these performances, our drygoods salesman had a rôle to play; and even his attire, his black necktie and the black studs in his shirt bosom were faithfully reported in the newspapers. On April 15, he recorded in his diary his impression of the crowd in the courtroom. "There was present the most disgusting set of Free-lovers. The women-part, thin-faced, cross, sour-looking, each wearing a look of 'Well, I am boss' and 'Oh, for a man.' The men, unworthy the name of men, licentious looking, sneakish, mean, contemptible, making a true man blush to be seen near them. This is Free Love."

Comstock's experience on the witness stand was not altogether pleasant. "The Counsel for defense," he wrote, on May 19, "seemed very bitter against me, and was determined to disparage me before the Jury." In this case, the defense made much of the fact that one-half of the fine was then allowed by New York law to the informer. But such sums Anthony had always wisely refused to accept, turning them over to charities. He must have had his moment of triumph, when he was able to make this point; and never, we may assume, did he tamely submit to the sneers of the inquisitor. "He has a ministerial bearing," notes the *Sun*

of May 20, 1873, "speaks deliberately and gesticulates freely. On his cross-examination, he frequently bit his lip and cast a withering glance at Mr. Bell [counsel for Train]."

In his defense, Train's counsel had thought it wise to adduce medical opinion that he was insane. This admission, as it developed, facilitated a summary disposal of the case. Having instructed the jury to acquit on the grounds of insanity, Judge Noah Davis—before whom in the fall of that same year Boss Tweed was to be tried—ended by remarking that he would send Train to the insane asylum at Utica. This entirely unexpected turn caused intense excitement in court; and presently the dictator rose to move the impeachment of the judge in the name of the people.

"Such a scene as for a moment ensued beggars description," reports Anthony's diary for May 20. The *Telegram* for the same date has an account, probably apocryphal, of the crusader's subsequent conduct.

Mr. Comstock, informer-general to the Young Men's Christian Association [runs this story], looked quite triumphant at first, but was evidently unable to bear the sight of his victim being carried off to a dungeon in a lunatic asylum. He put his cambric to his eyes to keep back the tears which had come unbidden, and was taken out in weeps, leaning on the arm of his bosom friend of some weeks, Mr. Luther C. Challis. As he left the room, the coming dictator followed him with mournful eyes and a pitying smile. All wrath had left the man's soul.

For his arbitrary action in this case, Judge Davis was liberally criticized. It was said that the legal profession in general believed that the charge of obscenity against Train could not have been sustained. Some sympathy for the dictator, who had vainly suffered nearly five months of imprisonment, was expressed in the newspapers. The

Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*, on May 22, even went so far as to say that "there is no class of people in the world who carry more of stupidity and cowardice than the Comstocks."

Whatever ills were to flow to George Francis Train from the verdict of insanity, he was not destined to languish in the asylum at Utica. Unchallenged, he drove away from the courtroom, and presently took ship for England.

During all these months, the lady brokers had been far from idle, and far from inconspicuous. They had engaged the Boston Music Hall for December 23, 1872, and for this occasion Victoria had prepared a speech, titled, "Moral Cowardice & Modern Hypocrisy, or Four Weeks in Ludlow-Street Jail." But Governor Claflin of Massachusetts, and the Chief of Police and the City Council of Boston prevented the meeting. Boston newspapers referred darkly to indecencies uttered by Mrs. Woodhull in her address to the Spiritualist convention. The Governor was quoted, in the *Weekly*, dated January 25, 1873, as having made the following statement:

We have enough bad women in Boston now, without permitting this one to come here to further demoralize us. Why, she might repeat the vile stories about Mr. Beecher, or even attack some of us in Boston. No, sir! This cannot be permitted. This prostitute shall not disgrace this hall or insult this city by speaking in it. She is no better than a panel thief or a common street walker, and I will see that she don't open her vile mouth in the city which was so recently honored by Mr. Beecher's presence.

Thus Boston was denied the speech on moral cowardice, and Victoria was obliged to content herself with uttering her impassioned periods in Springfield. This speech also formed the leader in the *Weekly* for December 28—an

issue which the sisters had hastened to prepare on their release from Ludlow Street. It contained, among other bitter comments, some scathing allusions to stool pigeons.

As might be supposed [wrote Mrs. Woodhull], that exemplary body of individuals known as the Young Men's Christian Association, had one on hand and in working order—as sanctimonious a looking individual as can be found in the City of New York—one who, if such a thing be possible, would deceive the “very elect” by his saint-like face. In short, he carries conviction by his very look. It is said that when he appears in Broadway concert saloons, where he goes, ostensibly to find the venders of obscene pictures, but, perhaps really, to drink beer from pretty waiters, there is always an evident and general desire to instantly unite in prayer. . . . Oh, Christian Comstock! Cease not thy labors!

After outlining the events of their arrest and imprisonment, the speech concluded with the assurance that the sisters would never hold their tongues.

In the same sarcastic vein, the *Weekly* elsewhere attacked Comstock, as “the special, though self-appointed agent of Christ, to suppress such literature, pictured and otherwise, as, in his opinion, is obscene.” Anthony had, not unnaturally, become almost an obsession with Mrs. Woodhull. She was constantly aiming her darts at him, and a new speech, “The Naked Truth,” contained yet another reference to the crusader. “Pickwick, as a prosecuting official, enhances the dangers of literature generally,” Victoria declared. “By some mental obfuscation of such a public functionary, there is no telling how soon some woman may be arrested for adultery, for kissing her own boy baby. I commend the subject to the consideration of the Young Men's Christian Association.”

This new speech had been prepared for a meeting to be held at Cooper Institute, New York, on January 9, 1873.

Whether Comstock's zeal was fired afresh by the prospect of this meeting, it is impossible to say. He had written in his diary on New Year's Day that on every day of the coming year he was resolved to try to do "something for Jesus"; and perhaps his renewed activities against the unholy sisters were connected with this pious wish. In any event, early in January he discovered that the issue of the *Weekly* for November 2, 1872, was still unlawfully on sale at certain news-stands, and he promptly responded to the challenge.

There had been a feverish demand for the suppressed issue. For the most part, the press had refused to mention the Beecher scandal, making only a cursory and frequently a veiled allusion to the reason for the sisters' arrest. But copies of the *Weekly* were bootlegged at an advanced price by news-dealers, the sisters maintaining that as high as ten dollars had been paid by persons curious to obtain the coveted details of the preacher's alleged indiscretions.

So outrageous did this defiance of law seem to Comstock that on January 4 he was on his way to Greenwich, Connecticut, to mail an order for copies of the suppressed *Weekly*, under the alias of J. Beardsley. On January 7, he was in bed with an ulcerated sore throat, and was too weak to do much writing; but he had received word from Greenwich that the papers had been delivered, and another bundle, ordered in the name of a Norwalk friend, provided further evidence against the lady brokers. The next day our man was out of bed, and off for Greenwich to get his papers. From Greenwich he went through the sharp winter weather by train and sleigh to Norwalk. On January 9 he swore out new warrants against Blood, Woodhull and Claflin. He was still so ill that he had to drive around in a carriage, but he went to the Broad Street office, where he found Colonel

Blood. The Colonel was again arrested, and in default of \$5,000 bail committed to prison.

When we arrested Blood [wrote Anthony that evening], there were about six or eight of the hardest kind of free-lovers, judging by their looks, to be found anywhere. Blood was much excited, and exclaimed, "Oh, we are all arrested again." Good men all seem glad and approve [the entry continues], but in my heart I feel God approves and what care I more. If Jesus be pleased, I care for nothing else. Oh, *just* to do thy will, Oh God, *just* to please Thee.

Warned by this occurrence Mrs. Woodhull remained away from the office in Broad Street. She felt sure that Comstock was resolved to prevent her appearance at Cooper Institute that evening, and she was equally determined that she should outwit him.

A little past noon [she wrote] the scavenger of the Christian Young Men marched into the office with two United States marshals, whom he seemed to command, and arrested Captain Blood,¹ but appeared terribly nonplussed when he found my sister and I were not there to welcome his lordship. I immediately received word of the movement and knew that all the ingenuity I could command would have to be brought into play if I were to speak that night in the Cooper Institute.

It would be impossible for me to secrete myself in the building [continued Mrs. Woodhull's account] and to appear upon the rostrum at the proper time. Therefore I resolved to assume a disguise. Some willing friends assisted, and I soon presented the appearance of an old and decrepit Quaker lady. In this costume I confidently entered the hall, passing a half-dozen or more United States marshals, who stood guarding the entrances and warning the people that there was to be no lecture that night—so certain were they of arresting me. But I passed them all safely, one of them even

¹ Mrs. Woodhull was frequently inaccurate in her statements. It seems surprising, however, that she should be in error regarding her husband's rank.

essaying to assist me through the crowd. On the pretense of deafness, I gradually worked my way down to the stage and finally upon it.

An anonymous member of the audience—which, according to the *Times* numbered about a thousand persons—described Mrs. Woodhull's appearance on the platform

With the celerity of a flash of lightning [runs this story], the old Quaker lady dashed from behind the pillar. Old age, coal-scuttle bonnet and gray dress disappeared like magic. Had a thunderbolt fallen upon the audience, they could not have been any more surprised and astonished. There stood Victoria C. Woodhull, an overwhelming inspirational fire scintillating from her eyes and beaming from her face. The Quaker costume lay coiled at her feet, and, with her breast heaving in long suppressed nervous emotion, her arms raised aloft in nervous excitement, her hair in wild and graceful confusion, and the head thrown defiantly back like the head of the Apollo Belvidere, she looked the personification of Liberty in Arms. Her voice rose in clear and piercing tones, like a song of love, blended with the war-cry of battle, and the pent-up forces of her soul rushed forth in an impetuous and irresistible torrent of burning, glowing words, thought and voice being full to repletion with the musical and magnetic energy of the Marseillaise.

Something in this amazing performance must have influenced the United States marshals, for, although several of them were on the platform, they made no effort to stop Victoria's speech, which was said to have lasted for an hour and a half. At its close, she surrendered herself "with as good a grace as I could command."

The case came up for examination before Commissioner Davenport on January 11, and Comstock was severely cross-examined. He was invited to state whether a passage from the Book of Deuteronomy was obscene, whether the works of Lord Byron, Shakespeare and Fielding were obscene, and

whether he was a man of a literary turn of mind. The *Sun* reported that he contradicted himself, and made a bad impression. But in his diary, Anthony confidently noted,

Their counsels, Howe and Jourdan, were very anxious to break down my testimony, but utterly failed. Truth was too much for them. They do not take stock very largely in that commodity.

The lovely Tennie soon surrendered herself, and all three prisoners were admitted to bail. As the examination proceeded, the crusader more than once complained that Counselor Howe maligned him "in a most abominably false manner." These attacks must have hurt, for Anthony protests too much. "Conscious that I am right, I care not," he writes in his diary. "He can do me no harm. I ought to blush that I even notice him here." On January 14, the following entry occurs:

Almost the entire day after 12 o'clock occupied by counsel for W. and C. in summing up. They still continue to abuse me, but they are beneath my notice. The defense are W. H. Howe (Tombs shyster), Ex-Judge McKinley (California gasser), and an old superannuated lawyer from the south, Jourdan, all for free-love.

Although the Beecher story had aroused the widest attention and had been generally accepted as the basis of the prosecution, there had, as we have suggested, been some confusion as to what part of the suppressed issue of the *Weekly* was considered obscene. Under cross-examination, Comstock had stated that his objections were based on the Challis article and this had finally been adopted as the attitude of the prosecution—though the sisters later protested that, after the defense was closed, the prosecution changed its stand, contending that the whole paper, including the advertisements, was obscene.

At length, early in February, Commissioner Davenport gave his long-deferred opinion. With some apparent misgivings, he conceded that he held the Challis article to be obscene. "Upon the further question as to the intention of Congress in the framing and passage of the statute, under which these proceedings were instituted,"² continued the Commissioner's decision, "I am quite clear that a case of this character was never contemplated, and under ordinary circumstances I should at once release the accused." But it developed that "the importance as well as the subtlety of the questions involved" and "the anxiety of the prisoners as well as the community for a definite settlement of the whole matter" constrained the Commissioner to hold the sisters and Colonel Blood for the Grand Jury. The Brooklyn *Eagle* sneered that the Commissioner "was never of more than microscopic magnitude, mental and physical."

Late in February, the three were again arrested, and again their release on bail was arranged. In addressing the court, Counselor Howe complained of Comstock's persecution of his clients, declaring that these repeated arrests were made to satisfy the vice-hunter's malice, and pointing out that the sisters, for an alleged misdemeanor, were now under \$60,000 bail, more than that required of Boss Tweed. His aspersions of Anthony, freely reported in the press, caused another entry in the small, purple leather diary of 1873.

I am called "obscene man." Well, what matters. Words hurt no one and as the course he is pursuing in maligning me at every point, is injuring his clients and not myself or my cause, I have no reason to complain. . . . Sometimes we serve the Master as well by "*bearing patiently*" as any other way. Brother Adams said to me tonight, "Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake." I am not worthy to apply this to myself, but the Master has spoken it. His

² The statute of June 8, 1872.

mercy and love knoweth no end. My soul answer thou. Does not this apply to you? Art thou not in all this work? Something each day for Jesus? Yes, so let it be. I will strive to do it for Jesus and in Jesus, and then His precious words apply to me.

While Comstock thus solaced himself for the obloquy which the case had brought him, the sisters were making good their determination never to hold their tongues. Sporadic issues of *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly* showed no trace of caution or reserve. In April, Victoria went on a two weeks' lecture tour. In an issue of the *Weekly*, dated May 17, the entire Beecher article was defiantly reprinted. Here was impudence indeed! But Comstock seems to have taken no notice. Had he grown eager to be rid of a case, which had proved to be weak, which had brought upon him so much abuse? We suspect that by spring he was heartily sick of the prosecution of Woodhull and Claflin. By this time, he had had a great experience in Washington. There were bigger and more heartening things in his life than this losing battle with the degraded advocates of free love.

Not until late in June did the trial of Woodhull, Claflin and Blood take place. Difficulty was had in filling the jury, and one juror was excused on the grounds of membership in the Y.M.C.A., and a bowing acquaintance with Comstock. The whole proceeding riled the crusader, he was growing more and more doubtful of the outcome, and characteristically he looked to God for comfort.

The judge seems to lean towards the defendants. His ruling in this case is all in their favor. A greater farce was never witnessed than the paneling of a jury. A person must be a fool or a near one, to serve on a jury. In God is my trust. There is no power that can withstand Him. He can control the minds of men, and over-rule all their designs. He says to the billows, "so far and no farther," so in this

case He is not wanting. I have placed it in His hands, and prayed that His will might be done. And that will is for the best, whatever it may be. I pray for grace to lay aside all my feelings and submit. It will be for the best in the end, though I cannot see it now.

On June 27, the case was dismissed, the prosecution having proved, according to the Brooklyn *Eagle's* headline, "An Inglorious Failure." The judge ruled that the law of 1872, under which the indictment was drawn, did not apply to newspapers, but only to the books, pamphlets and pictures which its provisions expressly stipulated. New thankfulness that he had been able to have another bill passed, a stronger, better, more inclusive bill than this paltry statute of 1872, must have mingled with the disappointment in Comstock's breast. The lady brokers, surrounded by a crowd of congratulating friends and smothered with bouquets, were free at last. Anthony consoled himself by going out and arresting Simpson, the book-dealer, for the third time.

Although he failed to make his point in either case, although his activities were widely derided and condemned, Comstock's association with Woodhull and Claflin and George Francis Train was of great significance for the crusader. At the outset of his career, he had bathed in the light of a nation-wide publicity. It had frequently been derogatory. But the office of reformer is eternally unpopular. The name of Comstock was becoming a convenient synonym for prudery, Puritanism and officious meddling.

Certain points remain to be considered in connection with the publicity which attended these trials. As complainant in the case of the *Weekly*, Comstock had aroused the suspicion that he was acting on behalf of Messrs. Beecher and

Challis. The Brooklyn *Eagle* had openly suggested that the charge against Woodhull and Claflin had emanated from Plymouth Church. But there seems to be no basis for believing this. Undoubtedly, Comstock was acting out of his high indignation against the fascinating financiers and all that they represented. He considered their paper an influence for harm. He welcomed an opportunity to bring action against it. His judgment may have been warped by indignation at the charges brought against the great divine. But we know that Comstock's beloved pastor, the Rev. William I. Budington, of the Clinton Avenue Congregational Church in Brooklyn, was throughout the course of the trouble hostile to his fellow preacher.

On the witness stand, Anthony swore that he had no connection with either Beecher or Challis; and early in 1873 he wrote in his diary, "*I know no Beecher or Challis or any other man, but to vindicate the laws and protect the young of our land from the leprosy of this vile trash.*" Later the diary records that Challis proposed that Comstock assist him in bringing a new suit for libel. "I declined," wrote the crusader, "to take any part with him at all unless forced to do so, as I have acted entirely independent of any and all persons, and do not desire to prejudice my cause by joining with any one."

In the nation-wide reverberations of the Woodhull and Claflin case, not all the sentiment had been unfriendly to the sisters. When Victoria bitterly commented on "the dumb spasm of the press," she referred to the newspapers of New York and Brooklyn which had, with few exceptions—the Brooklyn *Eagle* was a notable one—withheld mention of the indiscretions of which Mr. Beecher was accused. But out-of-town papers were less inhibited, and many of these, especially those of liberal views, showed a disposition to credit the scandal. This was particularly true

in the smaller cities, the following extract from the Seymour (Ind.) *Times* for January 9, 1873, being typical of a considerable number:

That these women have been shamefully persecuted admits of no doubt. . . . Perhaps no class of people are so thoroughly given over to licentiousness as the sleek and well-fed clergy, especially those of our cities. . . . The most shameful immoralities in organized society are committed under the cloak of "religion," and Mrs. Woodhull has done well to commence tearing away the veil just where she did.

More important in adverse reflection on Comstock's cause were the protests of the Jeffersonian press against bringing action in the Federal courts in a case of localized interest. On November 7, 1872, the Brooklyn *Eagle* discussed the Federal law against obscenity, in the following terms:

That penal consequences are set against mailing any matters which the Federal authorities may think, or affect to think, are of that character, notwithstanding they may not be of that character at all, is a not overstrong statement of the effect of the statute. It shows that without having generally known it, the people of this country are living under a law more narrow and oppressive than any people with a written Constitution ever lived under before.

The Troy *Daily Press* expressed the opinion that Comstock had "struck a dastard's blow at liberty and law in the United States." The following outcry from the *Weekly Argus* of Easton, Pennsylvania, is also of interest:

One of our standing boasts, "Liberty of the Press," is ours no longer, when, in the opinion of any single person, the contents of a paper are not exactly moral or high-toned, and should therefore be suspended and its publisher imprisoned. The strong hand of the United States Government is felt too often in Commonwealths where the local laws are all sufficient.

Another criticism which Anthony had to meet in 1872 and 1873 was that *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, at its worst, was no more to be condemned than many other papers of the time. Of the transgressors of morality, the New York *Herald* was in that day the conspicuous horrid example, particularly with respect to the character of its advertisements. From the Hartford *Times*, which said that, had the Beecher accusations appeared in the New York *Times*, there would have been no arrest—to the *Weekly Delta* of Visalia, California, which commented on the foul and obscene quack advertisements appearing in papers in all sections of the country, the impression was generally given that Comstock was afraid to tackle a paper of consequence. This seems rather unfair. Perceiving the weaknesses in the statute of 1872, he took the constructive step of having a stronger law passed; and this more stringent legislation resulted in a marked curtailing of dubious advertising. His crusade against the quacks is discussed in a later chapter.

Finally, there had arisen a clamor, of which reverberations were heard throughout the course of Comstock's work, against the assumption by an individual of the guardianship of public morals. The Sunday *Mercury*, in commenting on Mrs. Woodhull's arrest, had stated the case succinctly:

It does not seem right . . . that the whole machinery of the Federal Government, with its courts and marshals, should be placed at the beck of a man who has, somehow or other, chosen it for his private business to deprive this woman of her liberty. The whole proceeding has all the elements of a mockery, gratifying to no one but him who, "solitary and alone," has set it in motion.

Comstock was condemned in a variety of terms, but in none more scurrilous than those employed by Woodhull and Claflin and their sympathizers. "This illiterate puppy" was one of the names given him by the sisters; while during

the trial Judge MacKinley referred to him as the "modern Titus Oates, spy and informer to the United States Government." The Y.M.C.A. was labelled in the liberal press "that Jesuitical crowd" and "the organization of American Jesuits," and "those whited sepulchres styled Young Men's Christian Associations." Mrs. Woodhull was wont to write of "the Young Men's Christian (Christ forgive the connection) Association"; and even, with questionable taste, "the Young Mules' Concubine Association."

In February, Victoria published in the *Weekly* this characteristic comment.

From Maine to California we believe the new order of Protestant Jesuits, called the Y.M.C.A., is dubbed with the well-merited title of the American Inquisition. . . . We do not mean by this to assert that its leaders are like those of the Spanish institution of the same character. We should no more think of comparing Comstock, alias Beardsley, alias ——, with Torquemada, than of contrasting a living skunk with a dead lion.

We have said that by the time the Woodhull and Claflin case was ended, Comstock was deep in other affairs. The drama of the *Weekly* was played out, and the sisters and their champion, George Francis Train, had crossed the vice-hunter's path to pursue their separate ways. Eventually, the sisters went to England, where both made brilliant marriages. Tennessee, whose death occurred in 1923, became the wife of Sir Francis Cook, who made a fortune importing India shawls. Victoria married John Biddulph Martin, a wealthy London banker. For years she published a magazine, the *Humanitarian*. In 1893, a middle-aged figure, she delivered a lecture at Carnegie Hall, New York. She established herself successfully in England, and is said to have forced the British Museum to take from its shelves certain books which contained reflections on her character.

George Francis Train was marked for a less happy destiny, though even in ill-fortune that eccentric philosopher seemed to find many compensations. Through the action of the court in declaring him insane, he suffered severe property losses; from wealth he was reduced to a meager competency. He passed the last years of his life in the Mills Hotel in Bleecker Street, New York, where he subsisted on three dollars a week, finding nutriment chiefly in peanuts. Until his death in 1904, he was a familiar figure in Madison Square, where he spent much of his time on a park bench, making friends with the children, and sharing his diet of peanuts with the squirrels.

The two wild sisters were undoubtedly reprehensible in their conduct, and there may have been truth in the charges of blackmail which were made against them. George Francis Train, while harmless, was probably of unsound mind. But, as we read their stories, all three of these are touched by a mad and reckless gallantry.

This was a quality which Anthony Comstock was not fitted to recognize or appreciate. Yet we have said that he possessed some instinct for making himself publicly noticed; and perhaps this instinct was blindly functioning when he caused these arrests to be made. At the outset of his long career, his Puritan and censorious nature was dramatically held against a screen of vivid personalities. He had involved himself in that bright, chromatic and arresting thing called *news*. The drygoods salesman was obscure no longer; and the Christian laymen must have been painfully aware that their "still-hunt campaign" was become a matter of public knowledge and ridicule.

M. L.

CHAPTER IX

THE CONQUEST OF CONGRESS

COMSTOCK was an able fellow. Because he often appeared ridiculous, because he was sometimes ingenuous and always earnest, we must not forget that this was a shrewd Yankee. The Woodhull and Claflin case brought him a heaping measure of derision, but by spring he could afford to laugh at his scoffers. He had put across a good piece of business in Washington.

All along he had recognized that the Federal obscenity statute of 1872—little stronger than the original law of 1865—was insufficient for his purposes. He wanted a law which would operate effectively for all questionable matter, down to the last newspaper advertisement, mailed between the States.

But he did attempt one more newspaper prosecution under the law of 1872. Again his effort, this time directed against an important publisher, Frank Leslie, was unsuccessful. The founder of the magazine later known as *Leslie's Weekly* published several other illustrated journals, of which one, *Day's Doings*, met with Comstock's censure. Both the illustrations and the advertising gave offense, the latter being especially rich in notices of fancy books and pictures, of gambling materials, swindling schemes and contraceptive articles. Anthony had a small pocket notebook in which he pasted clippings of the objectionable advertisements.

He was very emotional about *Day's Doings*. Having succeeded on January 14, 1873, in getting indictments against

Frank Leslie, "At last, at last!!" he wrote in his diary. "Thank God! At last action is commenced against this terrible curse. Now for a mighty blow for the young." The fact that Leslie adopted a conciliatory attitude, that he declared he intended to make *Day's Doings* a moral paper in all respects, softened the reformer not at all. But the case was never called for trial, and in Anthony's office blotter appears the terse and bitter comment, "Fixed in District Attorney's office."

As early as December of 1872, Comstock had gone to Washington on the business of the new bill, which should change the outcome of cases such as this. The Committee for the Suppression of Vice had appointed him, with Mr. McBurney and Mr. Charles E. Whitehead—the latter had been influential in putting through the New York obscenity law of 1868—to take charge of the bills, both Federal and State, which had been prepared with the best of legal advice. Within the Committee, there had been some dissension as to the wisdom of trying to secure Federal legislation at this time. There had been so many attacks on Comstock in the newspapers, and his life, moreover, had been threatened. It did not seem an auspicious moment to go to Congress. But Anthony was determined to make the attempt; and Mr. Jesup was willing to pay the expenses of his trips to the Capital.

It might well be argued that Comstock had chosen a strange time to present a reform measure to Congress. At the moment when he made his appearance among the law-givers, they were preoccupied by the greatest Congressional scandal in the history of the United States. Special committees had been appointed in both houses to investigate the operations of the *Crédit Mobilier*, a joint-stock company organized to finance the building of the Union Pacific Railroad. The Democratic press had accused certain prominent

Republicans of accepting bribes to use their influence and votes in favor of the Union Pacific, and in the resultant investigations many reputations were besmirched, including even that of the Vice-President, Schuyler Colfax, whose political career was ruined by his association with a scandal which outraged public sentiment throughout the country.

Comstock's was a conscience so sensitive, a conception of duty so severe that we might expect him to be outraged by the exposures of corruption of which he must have heard so much in Washington. We have seen that in 1871 he fulminated against the "corrupt officials" of Brooklyn and New York. But he was sometimes surprisingly charitable to wrong-doers. When in November of 1873 Boss Tweed, after a career of wholesale robbery of the people of New York, was sentenced to twelve years' imprisonment, Comstock's first thought was one of pity for Tweed's son and his family, whose acquaintance he and Maggie had made in Connecticut during the summer. "The way of the transgressor is hard," he wrote in his diary at that time. "Who makes me to differ? My temptations were not equal to this poor man."

The diary of the weeks spent in Washington is for the most part oblivious of corruption. Not until the delays in passing his bill had tried him almost beyond endurance did he burst into invective, and then it is surprisingly mild.

Yet from the first we are made aware that this emissary to the Capital was not uncritical. It is hard to believe that the naïve and impressionable fellow who only two years earlier spent his honeymoon in Washington was already to bear his part there. This time there was no open-mouthed wonder at the city's grandeurs. This was a different expedition. His concern was with the exacting task which he had set himself, and two years colored high with opposition and controversy had taught him much. It was a stern-faced

young man who, late in January, 1873, visited the House with Representative Clinton L. Merriam—who had been influential in having the Federal statute of 1872 passed—and remained on the floor nearly all day, displaying his exhibits, to the horror of a number of the legislators. He rushed up to New York to report progress in terms so optimistic that all the members of his committee told him to return to Washington. He was only too willing. On the sixth of February, he hurried from the train to make a number of early morning calls on persons prominent in the Capital, including Representative Merriam and Senator William A. Buckingham—the latter had been war governor of Connecticut. Concerning this busy day, his diary tells us:

About 11:30 went up to the Senate with my exhibits. A. H. Byington of Norwalk very kindly aided me by securing the Vice-President's room and inviting Senators out to see me. I spent an hour or two talking and explaining the extent of the nefarious business and answering questions. Buckingham, Pratt, Ames, Rumsey, Cole and numerous others were present. All were very much excited, and declared themselves ready to give me any law I might ask for, if it was only within the bounds of the Constitution. I also saw the Vice-President. All said they were ready to pass my bill promptly this session.

Senator Buckingham had already brought the bill before the Senate, and Representative Merriam had introduced it in the House. Comstock, however, was not the only one who was seeking to legislate against obscenity. Another bill, concerned with legislation for the District of Columbia and the territories, had been introduced at the instance of the secretary of the Washington Y.M.C.A. There was, in addition, another bill which increased the penalty of the law of 1872, without broadening its scope. It was necessary to merge all these bills into one, and this service the lawyer, Benjamin Vaughan Abbott—a brother of Lyman

Abbott—volunteered to perform. It was the reconstituted and enlarged measure, substituted for all pending bills in that field, which Anthony hereafter refers to as “my bill.”

This bill of five sections which prohibited the mailing of obscene matter within the United States, including the District of Columbia and the territories, was so exactly and carefully worded that it closed many loopholes which were present in the statute of 1872. Among other new points which it contained, the advertisement of obscenity was forbidden. In this bill first appeared the phrase “for the prevention of conception,” which has occasioned so much controversy. Comstock also succeeded in embodying this phrase in the law of New York State, where it is a crime to give contraceptive information even verbally. (The Voluntary Parenthood League is authority for the statement that in this respect eighteen States have laws like that of New York, while twenty-two States have modelled their laws on the Federal statute.)

The refurbished bill met with the approval of certain prominent members of Congress, to whom Comstock speedily displayed it. On the evening of February 7, General Benjamin F. Butler, of the House Judiciary Committee, took the bill home with him. The General was especially interested, for he had himself sponsored a bill prohibiting the sending of obscene matter by common carriers.

I find great consideration shown me [wrote Anthony] and much interest about my bill. It is proposed to suspend the Rule in the House Monday, and pass this bill. I feel impatient and yet I know the Master knows best. His Will be done, not mine.

Yet in the midst of his anxiety, he had a thought for Maggie, for the diary goes on to say, “Telegraphed my

wife to come on tomorrow. It will be a great change for her, and I hope do her good. Spent evening at Rep. Merriam's House," he adds. But it would appear that the Merriam hospitality was not wholly appreciated, for there is a further entry. "I wanted to go to Speaker Blaine's reception, but had no clothes to wear. When I left N. Y. I only thought of one thing—this law."

The next morning he sat down in the Y.M.C.A. rooms to write letters to ten abortionists, whose undoing he aspired to be. Nine of them advertised in the New York *Herald*, he grimly noted. In the afternoon, there was a satisfactory conference with a new friend, Senator William Windom.

Maggie arrived, "all safe," but very tired, and Anthony wrote that it seemed so good to have her with him. The next day, the Sabbath, they attended a church service and a temperance meeting, and in the evening they went to the Theatre Comique. These last words sit with an unholy Gallic frivolity on the pious page of the diary. But it is all right, after all. At the Theatre Comique, there was a service of song, at which Anthony spoke and through God's help was enabled to speak eloquently. He had been strengthened for the morrow, but still it was a cruel disappointment that his bill passed neither House. General Butler, having promised to make only minor changes, had actually altered the bill radically. It was necessary to have it reprinted, and referred back to the committee for consideration.

The following day, February 11, it was to have been introduced by Merriam in the House, under a suspension of the rules which would permit its passage on the same day. But Garfield, of Ohio, called the regular order of business and the bill had to go over. In the Senate, however, Windom introduced the revised bill, and had it referred to the Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads.

At last a move is made [runs the diary]. I have had a hard day's work. It is very slow work and trying to patience. I propose to stay the whole session but what I pass this bill. I know there is *One above all* others. I can but pray to Him for his blessing. I have much to be thankful for; today I received three replies from N.Y. from Abortionists, to letters I wrote to their advertisements in Herald. [A line is skipped, perhaps from a sense of fitness, for the next item runs] Maggie and I dined and spent evening at Rev. Foster's house. Had a very pleasant time.

On February 12, the House and Senate were engaged in counting "electral" votes—but the bill was printed, and Senator Windom had arranged for it to be considered by the Committee on the morrow. Representative Merriam promised that, if it was passed by the Senate, he would see that it went through the House and was signed by the President, all on the same day. Heartened by this, Anthony realized a long-cherished dream—one that was frustrated by inclement weather on the wedding journey. He attended a White House function, and we may suppose that Maggie had been instructed to bring with her those clothes which, in his preoccupation, he had left behind. Again we are forced to observe that he was no longer the naïve and admiring country boy. His attitude was coldly censorious, he was not to be overawed. Had he not become a critic of manners?

Attended the President's reception with Maggie and Miss Abby Burchard [the diary states]. Shook hands with Grant. There were a large number present, among them certain ones who were almost caricatures of everything but what a modest lady ought not to be. They were brazen—dressed extremely silly—enamaled faces and powdered hair—low dresses—hair most ridiculous and altogether most extremely disgusting to every lover of pure, noble, modest woman. What are they? Who do they belong to? How can we respect them? They disgrace our land and *yet* consider themselves ladies.

The following day Comstock went before the Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads, and they unanimously consented to his bill, which was at once put on the Senate calendar. He received from more than one influential Senator an assurance of support, and in spite of past delays was emboldened to look for action at the next morning's session. But again his hopes were not realized. Senator Edmunds, of Vermont, had objections, and the bill went back to the Committee. To his diary Comstock confided his sentiments regarding the gentleman from Vermont.

He is known as the chronic objector of the Senate. One Senator said to me, "if the Lord's prayer should come up before the Senate, Edmonds would have some objection to make." He objects without knowing anything about what he is objecting to. Not that he is not learned and all that, but he knows not the points we desire to cover. . . . He is very stubborn and hard to reach. What does he care for the young of our Country if he can only have his say?

The next day, when he received a copy of the bill as amended by Edmunds, he confessed a suspicion. "Has he friends in this business that he desires to shield?" Senator Windom had been out of town, and there was solace in the fact of his return and his promise to get action on Monday, February 17. "My heart sinks within me at these delays," says the diary, "but I am encouraged when I know God reigns."

Maggie came to get him at the Capitol, and together they visited the Navy Yard. But his mind went back indignantly to Edmunds. Still, there had been good news, too. Senator Windom had told him that the Committee on Appropriations had set aside \$3,425 for a special agent, on the promise of the Postmaster-General that Comstock be appointed.

This is another indication of a kind Heavenly Father over me [Comstock writes]. O now my facilities for doing this great work will be very much better and I can work easier and be more successfull. I am glad I have not asked for such a thing. Windom seems determined that I shall be sustained and says that he means to see that this goes through the House and that I am thus Commissioned as Special Agent, P. O. Dept.

On Monday he spent most of the day in the Senate, but he was again disappointed. On Tuesday, Senator Buckingham called up the bill by unanimous consent, and it was read by the clerk. But on the informal objection of two Senators it was laid over. Comstock's day was spent in interviews, and in the display of exhibits. Wednesday and Thursday passed without progress, for one of the senators offered an amendment to the bill, which had to be printed. "O that men would hasten the wheels of Justice," Comstock cried, out of his "sore disappointment." Certain members of Congress had received letters denouncing him as a disreputable character and a perjurer, but, though signed by different names, their wording was so similar that they were clearly recognizable as a concerted effort of the powers of evil. Friday, February 21, saw nothing accomplished, and on that day the crusader had seven cases pending in the Federal Courts, before the Grand Jury, in New York, and he was forced to leave Washington until the following Monday.

During his stay in New York, the Committee for the Suppression of Vice passed a resolution, approving of what he had done in Washington. They were gratified to learn of his projected appointment as a Special Agent of the Post Office, but this was made the occasion of another resolution—"that Mr. C. be authorized and instructed by this Committee not to take any salary should Senator Windom's

resolution become a law." With this, Mr. C. was in complete accord.

This just meets my views of this question [he wrote]. I do not want any fat office created, whereby the Government is taxed or for some politician to have in a year or two. Give me the Authority that such an office confers, and thus enable me to more effectually do this work, and the Salary and honors may go to the winds.

It was very cold when he left New York on Sunday night, and he wrote that it "seemed very cheerless leaving home and wifey. Her dear face seemed sad as she bid me good-bye." But next morning he was back in the thick of the fight, with a new problem facing him. In his absence his bill had been passed by the Senate. But he was now reminded, that, without a saving amendment, the passage of this bill would quash all indictments and prosecutions pending under the obscenity law of 1872. Of these there were some eighteen or twenty with which Comstock was keenly concerned.

But Representative Merriam and Senator Buckingham were strongly opposed to adding another amendment at this date. It was February 24. In a week and a day, on March 4, Congress would adjourn. An amendment to the bill would necessitate its going back to the Senate to be passed again. Opposition to Comstock was increasing, as the attacks of his enemies and the hostility of the press created feeling against him. It was a terrible risk. But he could not bring himself to invalidate those prosecutions, and let the evil-doers go free.

So the amendment was incorporated in the bill and, while the House resounded with the *Crédit Mobilier* investigations, Comstock anxiously waited.

He was disturbed by an article—"entirely *malicious* and false, with scarcely a shadow of truth, lies out of whole

cloth"—which was published in the New York *Herald*, on this same day, February 24, as part of the Washington news.

The Senate cruelly put an end last evening to the hopes of a fellow named Comstock, who came here a few weeks ago with a budget of indecent engravings and immoral articles [stated the *Herald's* correspondent]. . . . Comstock eloquently descanted on the necessity for a law not only to prevent the sale of the dirty trash, but to suppress all advertisements which did not meet with his approval. Even such a law as he desired, he said, would be a dead letter on the statute book unless there could be a special postal agent appointed, who could enforce it. "But," said the virtuous Comstock, "if I receive this appointment, I shall entirely reform the advertisements of every newspaper in the country." Alas for Comstock! He adroitly managed to have the paragraph authorizing the coveted appointment inserted in the Postal Appropriation bill, but when it came before the Senate, it was unceremoniously rejected, and he was left out in the cold with his indecent stock in trade. When the government desires a censor of advertisements or of morals, he will doubtless be appointed.

With unshaken fortitude he confided to the diary, "They may do and say what they please about me, but if they interfere with my work, *then beware*. Comstock is nothing. The Master's work *everything*." He had a bad cold, and received "a very sweet letter from Darling Maggie." Thursday of this momentous last week came and went, and still his bill had not been passed. He saw the law-givers with jaundiced eyes.

Credit Mobilier [he wrote] is the chock before the wheels of legislation. The exhibitions of today in the Halls of legislation has been one that outrages all decency. Men assailing one another's character while legislation goes begging. Malice fills the air. Party bitterness and venom. Loud talk of constitution, law, justice. It seems a burlesque on our Forefathers. . . . They tear out all principle and leave the skele-

ton, and where then is the Constitution. Every word of the latter was cemented by grand principles. But today it is Constitution with just as little truth or justice as it is possible. It seems as if every man, almost, acted from personal motives or party interests, regardless of right or Justice. It is dead law, without vitality, without Justice. As I look over the House of R., I see few, very few men here that the young men of today can safely pattern after. John Hill of New Jersey is a glorious exception. He lives Christ in Washington and those who know Washington's life know what that means.

By Friday morning, his bitter anxiety had found a vent in irritation against Representative Merriam.

We thought our bill should surely pass this morning. It was placed on the Speaker's desk, but Mr. M. was not up to time and the regular order was called and it had to go over. There was no reason why it was not passed except that Mr. M. was incompetent. He never opened his mouth, although the Speaker had promised him. Again at the evening session an opportunity was again offered, but he sat in his seat reading a newspaper until it was *too* late. I felt almost out of patience with him [he adds with rare moderation].

Saturday morning, March 1, came. James G. Blaine, the Speaker of the House, had promised to call up the bill. He had it in his hand, the anguished Anthony saw, but some one demanded the regular order, and he laid it aside. In the evening, Comstock walked with Mr. Blaine from the Senate Chamber to the House. That afternoon, the Speaker had received personal telegrams from two influential members of Comstock's committee—Mr. Jesup and Mr. Dodge. Again he promised that he would "put my bill through sure tonight." The evening passed in suspense, in torment.

There were a number of little bills called up and passed, while the Speaker held mine in his hand. O how my heart

ached. There were numbers of times when it might have been called up, but Mr. M. seems so indifferent or else incompetent. He could surely in all these days have at least called out "Mr. Speaker" and tried to have got the floor; but no, not a word passed his lips.

Despair is close to Comstock now. The precious moments slip past, and midnight comes and—can we have forgotten?—it is the Sabbath.

Trumbull tells us: "He heard a still small voice saying something that he had learned from his mother in the Connecticut home years before: 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.'" Conflict stirred in him. He argued the expediency of remaining to watch his bill. But conscience was stronger than expediency. Conscience won; and at twelve-thirty, when he had desecrated God's day for half an hour, he dragged himself from the House "in a fearful state of mind."

According to Trumbull,

He left the Capitol, walked down to Pennsylvania Avenue, then up the avenue to his room; and as he walked, through the cold March night the stress of his conflict seemed to force the perspiration out of every pore of his body. His brain was on fire. Even if he could forget his personal discomfiture, he was facing another full year without a law adequate to check the blighting evils that he now knew he must give his life to blotting out. That thought was too much. He was willing to surrender all he had in doing this work for the Lord, but to this crushing blow in the Lord's own service he could not say "Thy will be done." He reached his room, and he tried to pray. He could still pray for his bill, but he would not pray a willing acceptance of God's will if it were to cross his own.

The diary tells his struggle.

The Devil seemed determined to claim me as his servant [records the tiny script]. He tempted me and made my heart feel rebellious. Yet a stronger hand was over me. I

felt O so crushed, so broken down, so tempted to sin against God. I thought of Herald article against me, and of my failing etc. and of all that they would say now of reproach. O I felt almost like distrusting God, doubting and rebellious and then I went to bed, to pass the night beset by the Devil.

At eight o'clock on Sunday morning, the young man was up, and later he was restlessly driven to seek the Y.M.C.A. rooms. But they were closed.

As I returned [he wrote] I went by the churches and heard their Bells ringing. I did not feel like going to church. A desire to be alone and rest took possession of me. I went back to house and read a sermon on "Christian Life." Knowing only to do the *will* of God. At last the grace of God triumphed. About 11:30 I went to my room and told the Lord Jesus all my trouble and all my sins. I prayed for grace to say and feel "Thy will be done," not mine. I prayed that if my bill might not pass, I might go back to N. Y. submissive to God's will, feeling it was for the best. I asked for forgiveness, and that my bill might pass if possible, but over and above all the Will of God. What peace! What joy! What delight! O how can I describe the burden that rolled off. A summer day was never more serene or peaceful than my heart was, after Jesus said, Peace be still, and sent his peace. I felt then it was for the best, and I was content to have it just as God *willed*.

So this tormented Christian drew victory from defeat, found resignation in despair. It was not until three o'clock of that Sunday afternoon that he learned there had been no defeat, that resignation was not needed. At the Y.M.C.A. he met the chaplain of the Senate, and found that his bill had passed the House, about two o'clock that morning, with only thirty votes against it. The delinquent Merriam had at length delivered himself of a speech, in the closing words of which may possibly be found an explanation of his procrastination. "With the passage of this bill," he

declared, "I shall have performed a most uninviting duty."

However uninviting, the duty had been adequately performed. Mr. Merriam had eloquently spoken of "the best interests of morality and humanity"; and, in urging the legislators to abolish the evil traffic in obscene literature, he had even made the appropriate emotional appeal—that the purity and beauty of womanhood be suitably shielded.

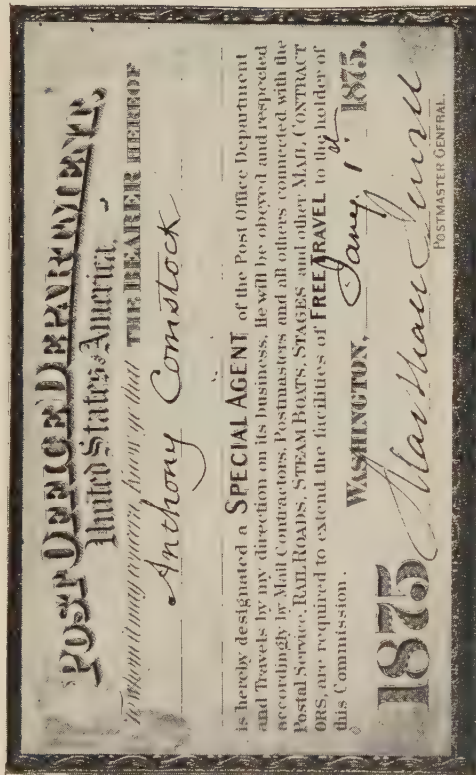
After its passage in the House, Comstock's bill had been sent to the Senate, where it had been speedily passed as amended. The young man who could not wait up on the morning of the Sabbath had been "beset by the Devil" for nothing.

With a phrase as rhythmic as the Psalmist's begins his entry for Monday, March 3. "O how can I express the joy of my Soul or speak of the mercy of God." That very day his bill was signed by Grant, and thus became a law. He was obliged to remain for two or three days in Washington to attend to certain small formalities. "I am also to wait," he adds, "at the suggestion of a few Gents. to get a Commission from the P. M. General. O how much will this strengthen my hands. If it comes, it must be God's gift to me."

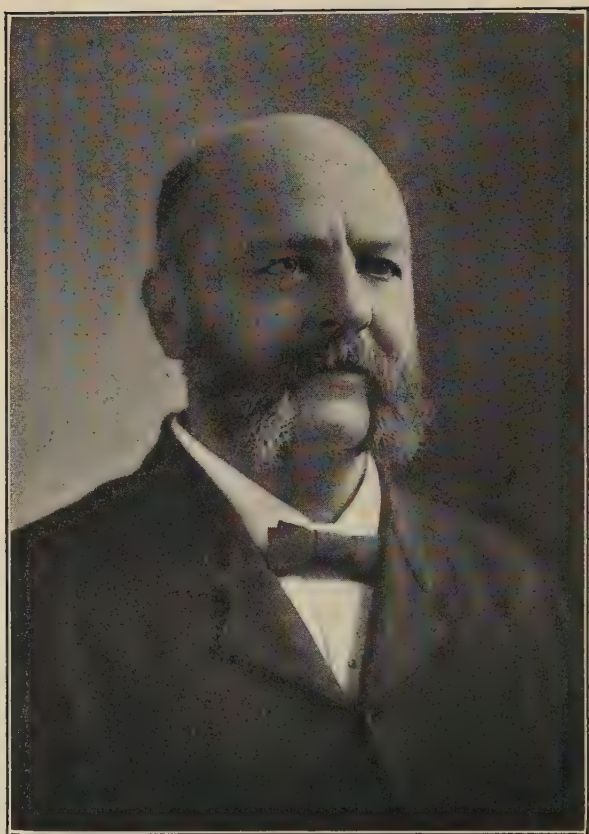
You can feel his exuberance chiming through the words of the diary's entry for the next day. Here was a man who had fought and won, who had acquitted himself well, who was sustained by the hand of God. And he was in the midst of bustle and excitement, for President Grant was taking office for the second term, and it was a fine time for a man with a light heart to be in Washington.

Whew! Isn't it cold, terribly cold [the diary almost sings] and dusty on Pennsylvania Avenue. The Inauguration procession was very grand indeed. I had a balcony seat in front of Diblin & Co.'s. store where we had an unobstructed view. The evening we spent viewing Fireworks. . . . The

By virtue of his commission from the Post-Office, Comstock enjoyed the privilege of free transportation on all lines carrying mail. But, more than this, his job as Special Agent—he was later Inspector—vested him with special powers and made his work national in scope. A photograph of his commission for 1875 appears below.



The seal shown above was early adopted by the Society for the Suppression of Vice, and for many years embellished its stationery. On the left, the purveyor of obscenity is being thrust into a cell; while on the right a Christian layman consigns infamous volumes to the flames.



This is the face which was familiar to the American public throughout most of Anthony Comstock's fighting career. The famous side-whiskers, significant of Anthony's conservatism, were never discarded. The youthful expression of earnestness has deepened into a look of grim determination.

Inaugural ball was largely attended but it was so very cold that the ladies had to keep their shawls on. The City is crowded to overflowing with people. . . . Visited the Ball-room and helped hang up the Picture, "Angel of Peace," which Miss Ella Cooper has painted for President Grant to be presented to him. We hung it in the President's supper room. It looked very fine.

He was nagged by an impatience to be back in the little Brooklyn home, but he was forced to wait over until Thursday, March 6. On Wednesday, he called on Senators Buckingham and Windom, to "bid them adue" and receive their congratulations. On Thursday morning he got his commission as Special Agent from the Postmaster-General, and at one o'clock he took the train for New York. It was so crowded that he had to stand almost all the way to Philadelphia, but he made several new acquaintances. One of these was Ex-Governor Ward of New Jersey, whom he told about his work. This was a man whose fortitude won the crusader's admiration. "He met with quite a loss on the Horse Car in Washington, a Pickpocket stole a diamond stud, worth \$2,000. The Gov. seemed very cool and possessed about it."

It was after midnight when he reached home, to find "a darling little wife" very glad to see him. So, early on the morning of his twenty-ninth birthday, ended a momentous chapter of his experience.

But to figure the experience in Washington in terms of a chapter that was closed is to misinterpret our man. To Comstock it was most truly the beginning of new things, an assurance of strength and authority for the task he had set himself. He had been confirmed, upheld. Those law-givers in Washington were a disillusioning set of fellows—there were very few among them that a young man could safely pattern after. Yet, when all was said, they had passed

his bill. He must have applauded the sentiment expressed in a clipping about his bill which he cut from the New York *Journal of Commerce*, for March 7, 1873 — "Something will be forgiven to a Congress which thus powerfully sustains the cause of morality."

M. L.

CHAPTER X

COMSTOCK SHOWS HIS BADGE

ON the wings of his new authority, Comstock swooped jubilantly down upon the malefactors. Increased power and confidence warmed him to his task. He was a man consumed with energy and a love of domination, and in the years which followed these were to find a wide expression—in relentless pursuits, dramatic arrests, and bitter prosecutions.

He was not long in testing the prestige of his commission as Special Agent of the Post Office. Comstock was never one to hide his authority under a bushel. An associate was fond of telling how the old crusader was nearly run over by a wagon one rainy day, as he plunged across lower Broadway. Purple with rage, he shook his badge under the horse's nose, crying, "Don't you know who I am? I'm Anthony Comstock!" We should have explained that it was a mail wagon, and the horse was, in a sense, his subordinate. So, from the first, many a mail clerk smarted under reprimands of this irascible superior.

He had, we have said, been accused of cowardice because he had not attacked the important newspapers. Victoria Woodhull had repeatedly made this charge with all her caustic and rhetorical vehemence. In *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly* for February 15, 1873, she had reprinted a number of advertisements from the *New York Herald*—inserted for the most part by quacks, for the "medical" columns of the great daily were notorious—appending to them the following taunt:

We also gracefully submit the above bouquet to the Comstockians of Twenty-third Street and Fourth Avenue, as a peace-offering. It will answer our purpose if they place it carefully in the button-hole of their leaders (now sadly in need of some fragrance), the well known firm of "theological tinkers" of this city.

Members of the Y.M.C.A., if you mean business, here is game worthy of your steel. Will you venture to assail it? Or are you only valorous enough to attack women?

But that Comstock's course had been a constructive one was, after the passage of his bill, sufficiently clear. On March 12, in an editorial strongly commending the reformer's work, the *New York Times* said,

The attempt to suppress obscene literature and advertisements is likely to be successful, now that it is backed up by a Congressional law. Already the *Herald* has been obliged to weed out its infamous advertisements—advertisements which have brought ruin to the souls and bodies of countless human beings. Yesterday its disgusting "medical" notices were all compressed into the smallest compass.

Here was good news indeed; and the promises of co-operation and support which Comstock received from the editors of the *Times*, in the course of two conferences with them, must have been encouraging, too. He wrote in his diary on March 13,

Today *Herald* has stricken out the objectional parts of their advertisements. This is a great victory. The *Sun* has also followed the *Herald's* example. The reporter of the *Sunday Mercury* asked me to call at the office of his paper, and designate the objectional advertisements of that paper, that the same might be dealt with accordingly—stricken out. Who shall say anything is now impossible.

The editor of the *Sunday Mercury*, however, proved less compliant than the agreeable reporter.

He seems to talk [Comstock wrote a few days later], that because he publishes a paper he should be licensed to put anything in it he chooses. That he is not to believe anything only what suits him about any advertisement in his paper. That no law can proscribe what a paper shall publish, etc. He did not seem free to say that he would strike out an advertisement even though the parties engaged were known to be villains or abortionists. I think a little wholesome law will bring him to terms. He says he shall have to have the law changed next session. Let's see him!

In the midst of a whirlwind of activity, of accomplishment, he dined with Mr. Jesup and delighted him with the full story of his Washington experience. A few nights later there was a meeting of the Committee for the Suppression of Vice.

After the Committee adjourned [wrote Comstock], Mr. J. took me one side and told me he should send me a note of \$300 that I owed him as paid. He would not let me speak a word of protest.

With such support, with such a friend and bathed in the warmth of such triumphs, he could lightly dismiss the inevitable attacks on his integrity.

Counselloer Spencer today tried to show that I sought a fat office in Washington [states the diary on March 18]. But I could triumph over them all. I said, No, sir, I did not seek a fat office.

This repartee must have been sustained by some decision of manner which the diary does not report. For it was effective. Counselor Spencer was, the diary adds, "chagrined enough."

Yet he was not always entirely confident. Still, through his belief in himself, flickered those harassing doubts, those questionings of self. "I pray for grace and strength," he

wrote, "to govern myself and do all things decently and in order. I am so impetuous, at times I am so weak and unworthy." But whatever uncertainties he confided to the privacy of his diary, we may feel assured that they were not communicated to those he encountered in his work. At this moment he was embarking on his campaign against quack advertising—one of the dearest and bitterest of his antipathies. In no cause did he show a more passionate zeal than in the fight against the purveyors of contraceptive remedies or devices. A number of these law-breakers were making Albany their headquarters; and his trips to that city served a double purpose—that of prosecuting them and of lobbying for a bill strengthening the New York obscenity statute.

Many Assemblymen were to be interviewed in this connection; and again Maggie was given an outing—for on one trip she accompanied him to the State capital, and they visited "the Park and Penitentiary." One Assemblyman and one only, we learn from the diary, was openly opposed to Comstock's amendment. This was a law-maker described as "a Methodist exhorter," but his livelihood was derived from the importing business, and obscene rubber goods were among the articles in which he traded. This fact Anthony belligerently threatened to reveal. The other Assemblymen, in a desire to spare their Methodist associate "the disgrace and Exposiure," offered assurance that he would change his way of thinking, if Comstock promised discretion. The amendment was passed.

Throughout the rest of this year of 1873, he was on a rampage of trips—to Syracuse, Rochester, Hartford, Boston, Chicago, St. Paul, St. Louis. This agent of the Post Office was to cover wide tracts of his native land in the discharge of the duties his office brought him. By January of 1874, his work had caused him to travel by railroad 23,500 miles.

Such jaunts were significant of the meaning of his commission, for now his authority against the evil-doers was become as broad as the last boundary of the States and territories.

During these years he must have dreamed a great dream of extending his work until it should be a living force in every city of the land. Such an aspiration he expressed in his diary, and gradually under his influence there began to be organized a number of Societies for the Suppression of Vice. The Western Society, with headquarters in Cincinnati, St. Louis and Chicago, functioned vigorously for years under the leadership of R. W. McAfee. That in Boston has enjoyed a long and active career, under the name of The New England Watch and Ward Society. When it was initiated in 1876, Mr. Comstock was present and addressed the meeting. Throughout his life, he manifested a strong interest in the activities of the Boston group, and frequently had occasion to send them counsel regarding legislation or the prosecutions which they had undertaken.

The scope of his work had widened, he had new opportunities for usefulness—all this was very good. But in the year 1873 he almost wore himself out. The diary frequently records that he felt weary, that his head ached. His "precious" went to Freehold on a visit, and he was lonely in his "topsey turvey house." He bought a "nice little carpet for upstairs" with which to surprise her. By the time she returned, he was almost ill. "I have made myself sick," he acknowledged, "by over-exertion and from being irregular in my habits and eating at all hours and in much haste."

In July of this year he and Maggie attended a Y.M.C.A. conference at Poughkeepsie, New York. A discussion of "What Can Associations do to destroy the effects of Pernicious Literature?" was opened by the Rev. Lyman Abbott in

"an able speech." The prospect of this discussion had evidently awakened misgivings in the breasts of those associated with Anthony; for some hours earlier—reports the diary—"Bro. McBurney came to me and thought I had better not appear or say anything on the subject. Bro. Sturges, of Boston," the entry continues, "also came and was very solicitous lest I should let my feelings carry me away." But all this forewarning was wasted effort, as we could have anticipated it would be. "I spoke, notwithstanding," wrote Comstock, "and I convinced them I could speak gauredly, notwithstanding their fears." Later, "a few staunch ones" held a conference on the subject of obscene literature, and a friend invited Anthony and Maggie to have some ice cream with the Rev. Lyman Abbott. A "delightful time" was reported. He escorted the willing Maggie through Vassar College, and declared it "a great sight."

He had waved aside Brother McBurney's warnings, he had defied him and with success, but intimations of trouble with the Y.M.C.A. continue to percolate through the diary's record. For several months, there had been on foot a project to charter a Society for the Suppression of Vice, independent of Y.M.C.A. control, and with this plan Comstock was in complete accord—asserting indeed, that he had been the first to suggest it. He was eager to be free of the restrictions of the Y.M.C.A., of their disapprovals and faint-heartedness. Their enthusiasm for the great task of purgation was not as avid as his; and, while he could on occasion "speak gauredly," such reticence was against the nature of this fiery reformer. It cannot be said against Anthony that his prudishness led him into an over-nicety of thought and speech. He wanted to denounce the evil-doers with Biblical frankness, with Anglo-Saxon clarity, with all the invective that his violent nature and colorful imagination suggested.

Of a call on Morris K. Jesup on July 17, he wrote,

He was glad to see me and was very Cordial. He stands by me. He said he was almost discouraged on account of jealousies in the Committee. He thinks that perhaps the Society for the Suppression of Vice ought not to be formed just at present. I trust it may be. Some on the Committee want to rule, or are afraid to go ahead, and think I make false arrests. Bah! Such men, for men. Suppose a newspaper does attack me, that is no reason why I should swerve from duty. Is not my reputation—all, all I have—consecrated to this work.

A few days later, he wrote,

The Committee seemed to lack interest in my work. They are strong when prosperity comes and smoother sailing, but let an evil report come and then fear and trembling.

With perturbation of spirit, he took up his duties in September, after a vacation spent with Maggie in Westport, Connecticut. This was a time of crisis in the nation. But of the panic of 1873, which was to leave a wake of so much disaster and so much despair, Anthony's diary contains little trace. On September 20—on a sort of sightseeing expedition, we may suppose—he visited the Stock Exchange, and his sister-in-law, Jennie Hamilton, and a friend were present when "the Board Closed, on account of the terrible failures." He satisfied himself that his own small funds were safe, and the matter passed from the pages of the diary. But intermittently, through the remainder of the year, he complained that the Christian laymen were short of funds and delayed in paying him his sorely needed salary. This fall of 1873 saw his formal severance from the drygoods business—his definite adoption of vice-hunting as his sole means of livelihood. Comstock was a drygoods clerk no longer. Vaster spheres of influence and activity were opening before him.

Presently that same fall, in the Y.M.C.A. rooms, "a meeting of prominent Gentlemen" gathered; and this time the Society for the Suppression of Vice was formally organized—to Comstock, another evidence of God's blessing. But, concerning a later meeting, called for the purpose of framing the by-laws for the new society, he had a complaint to make. "They none of them seemed to realize the importance of this Society except to relieve the Committee of its present burden. Only one Man thinks as I do and that is Mr. Jessup.¹ He is alive."

Not only had certain members of the Y.M.C.A. Committee been frightened by "evil report" of their agent's work—it is incredible that they had ever contemplated activities conducted on so great a scale as that on which Comstock was operating. By December of 1873, he had made fifty-five arrests under the new Federal law, and from these had already procured twenty convictions. His commission as Special Agent continually sent him flying in pursuit of malefactors in other cities. The Christian laymen had adopted an obscure young man, had paternally taken him under their protection. What a lottery, if Anthony's spirit will forgive us, the choice of that protégé had been! Their unknown drygoods salesman had developed amazingly. He was no longer unknown. He was not even a drygoods salesman.

In Doggett's *Life of Robert R. McBurney*, the statement is made regarding Comstock's work that "the amount of time and labor necessary for its prosecution, and its manifest importance, led the board of directors to draft a bill for the incorporation of a society to be especially charged with the suppression of this traffic."

¹ In spite of his enduring admiration for Morris K. Jesup, Comstock never learned to spell his benefactor's name correctly.

William Adams Brown, in his biography of Morris K. Jesup, tells more of the story.

. . . there was a feeling among many persons who sympathized with Comstock's objects [writes Mr. Brown], that the matters with which he had to deal were too unpleasant to be touched by persons of sensitive feeling, and that more harm was done by stirring up the pool than by letting it lie. So strong was this feeling and so great the odium which attached to those who supported Comstock, that the committee of the Young Men's Christian Association, under which the work had been carried on, considered it no longer expedient to continue its official support.

In January, 1874, the Y.M.C.A. issued a pamphlet, labelled "Private and Confidential." It was addressed to the gentlemen who had contributed to the support of the Committee for the Suppression of Vice, now being supplanted by the newly organized Society for the same. The statistics listed in this pamphlet are impressive. Of books of improper character, 134,000 pounds had been seized and destroyed by Mr. Comstock. Obscene pictures and photographs, to the number of 194,000, had met the same fate. Many other notable items swell the list, including 14,200 pounds of stereotype plates, 60,300 rubber articles, 5,500 indecent playing cards, and 3,150 boxes of pills and powders. On persons convicted through Mr. Comstock's efforts, prison terms amounting to a total of twenty-four years and one month had been imposed, in addition to fines aggregating \$9,250.

Concerning the activities of their secretary, Mr. Comstock, the members of the committee officially spoke praise in this pamphlet. They commended his "great boldness, courage and tact," and applauded his successful efforts at Washington.

Nor must it be inferred that, outside the discreet and

formal limits of a leaflet, the pillars of the Y.M.C.A. disowned the reformer. On the contrary, many of them remained in hearty sympathy with his work. To the newly formed Society, many Christian laymen were willing to lend their names, their influence and their financial support. Such men as Cephas Brainerd, Alfred Smith Barnes, William E. Dodge, junior, and Kiliaen Van Rensselaer took active part in sponsoring Comstock's work, and the name of J. Pierpont Morgan is listed among the incorporators of the Society. With exquisite appropriateness, a soap manufacturer, Samuel Colgate, served as president for more than twenty years.

These gentlemen and others like them were to stand by Anthony Comstock through forty years of conflict. Approximately ten thousand dollars a year was expended by the Society, and this money was all furnished by voluntary subscriptions. In the values which they were seeking, their agent gave them their money's worth. He was thrifty, untiring and persistent. Perhaps this last quality, a dogged tenacity in the chase of evil, is as characteristic of the man as any other. In 1906, we find him leading off to the Tombs an old man of seventy, bent, white-haired, almost decrepit. It was Conroy. There is no record that he offered resistance this time.

M. L.

CHAPTER XI

THE PALACE OF RESTELL

COMSTOCK always admitted that he stormed the palace of Restell because every one said he would not dare. She was an institution, a legend and in the popular mind a practitioner of black arts. In plain fact, this elderly Cockney woman was a former midwife who early in her career went over to contraception and abortion. But in changing sides she moved with banners flying. Her trade was illegal and not essentially romantic, and yet she readily took on magnificence. In the press her great house at the corner of Fifty-second Street and Fifth Avenue was never spoken of except as "the palace," and the newspapers very generally ignored the fact that her real name was Ann Lohman. Madame Restell they called her.

When Comstock and his policemen came, she called for her victoria and said to the coachman in her livery, "The Tombs, John." Down the avenue they drove, Restell and Comstock, and the black ostrich plumes on her hat nodded in the breeze and there was the glow of sunlight on her velvet cape. What did these two talk about during the journey? Unfortunately the reporters of the day seem to have overlooked this important point.

The footman handed her down at the jail door and let Anthony scramble after her unaided. But there was no deep stability under the swagger of Restell for she knew that this grim pursuer had his case in hand. And though he

had lied to her most shamefully in working up his evidence she knew him for one unscrupulous only in the doing of what he called the work of God. There was little hope that he could be bought off, but still she tried and offered forty thousand dollars.

The dread of jail lay heavily upon the mind of Madame Restell. Once she had served a year on Blackwell's Island. Now she was sixty-seven, and the bitter memory had been thrust down deep under a long life of softness and safety. Arrests and threats of prosecution? Oh yes, Restell knew these, but they never came to anything. Such things could be arranged, and were—but not this time. Anthony was all ablaze with eager righteousness. One cannot say to Gabriel, "Not now—some other day," and Comstock quite definitely pictured himself as one of the grimmer angels.

Many criticized him when she killed herself, but he was not abashed and merely said, "A bloody ending to a bloody life." Surely no one could hope to escape the charges of Comstock by carrying the case to God. This, so he thought, was the court of all courts most favorably disposed to the work in which he was engaged. Judges with less jurisdiction sometimes slighted his evidence and at times suspended sentence. And when he fumed after such experiences, he took comfort in the thought that there would be a final reckoning and penalties even more severe than those he sought.

Only in one respect did Restell cheat his wrath. The papers gave long columns to the fantastic story that the woman was not truly dead, but had slipped off to Europe, leaving behind some purchased body to act as substitute. Such was the popular faith in the wiles and power of Restell. But she was dead enough. The coroner knew that. They called him to her palace and he found her in the bathroom where she had cut her throat. It was all very

simple. The only thing which surprised him was the diamond studs in the bosom of her nightgown.

The New York *Sun* of that day was generally held to be a godless paper, and so it may be that Comstock did not mind the editorial comment which it made on the morning of April 2, 1878:

No matter what the wretched woman was who took her life with her own hand yesterday, her death has not freed the world from the last of detestable characters. Whatever she was, she had her rights, and the man who cunningly led her into the commission of a misdemeanor acted an unmanly and ignoble part.

The motive avowed by Mr. Comstock, according to the reports at the time, to wit, the vindication of his own character as a public prosecutor, afforded a poor apology for the meanness to which he stooped. He had been taunted, he said, with not daring to arrest her. So he deceived and wheedled her into a crime.

Every one has rights. Even Anthony Comstock has his; but there is a healthier sentiment afloat today than usual, concerning the policy of doing evil that good may come, which he has seemed to be pursuing.

Whether or not this criticism touched Comstock closely, he did paste the editorial in his scrap book, and also one from the *Herald Presbyter*, a religious paper in Cincinnati, which said in part:

We have always had strong sympathy for Anthony Comstock, in the important and delicate philanthropical work in which he is so honorably and so successfully engaged. He attacks the powers of darkness in one of their vilest strongholds, brings to trial and to prison many a person who is, for gain, trafficking in the purity and innocence of youth, and in this work deserves, and has largely received, the support of those who wish well to society. We should be sorry to throw any obstacle in his way; and yet we must be permitted to express a doubt, if not to enter a remonstrance, upon the

wisdom of some of his methods, if what is reported in a "Letter from New York," published in last week's *Congregationalist*, be true.

"Madame Restell" is the name of a woman whose disreputable course is too well known to need extended remark; has long been "notorious," as the aforesaid New York letter says, "for illegal and immoral practices under the thin disguise of medical attendance on women." She has been engaged in this business "for more than thirty years," and her pecuniary success is seen in the fact stated that she has accumulated a fortune amounting to \$1,500,000. She has hitherto eluded the officers of the law, so far as conviction is concerned, except in a single instance, though several times arrested, during her early career, and for many years "has enjoyed perfect immunity." What we regret is Mr. Comstock's method of procedure in securing her arrest. This is stated in this New York letter as: "By skillfully playing the part of an applicant for her services, Mr. Comstock not only entrapped the woman, but secured instruments, medicines, etc., that clearly proved the illegal character of her business."

It is a nice question how far Christian people may go in "skillfully playing" a part of this sort. . . . We are well aware that "strategy"—often the very essence of deception—is regarded as essential in war, and that employing "detectives" is often deemed necessary to ferret out crime, where deceit is the most potent weapon a detective can use; but are these to be employed in the category of Christian methods and work, in intercepting the unworthy and carrying on our schemes of philanthropy? Does an enlightened Christian casuistry sanction such proceedings?

About a month after the Restell case there was a meeting in Boston to organize a society modelled after the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. Naturally Comstock was a speaker. He was interrupted by a clergyman who wanted permission to ask three questions, "Did you ever use decoy letters or false signatures?" he inquired. "Did you ever sign a woman's name when writing a letter? Did you ever try to make a person sell you forbidden wares and

CASH ACCOUNT—OCTOBER.

Date.		Received.	Paid.
	Amounts	\$158 31	157 25
18	Charge on Octator 3 ⁰⁰		3 00
19	Index to P. D. Anniversary 1 ⁰⁰		1 00
	Milk 2 2 Hh. S. Octator 6 ⁵⁰		8 50
20	Rapes 5 ⁰⁰ m 1 ⁰⁰ J. A. Wells 2 ⁵⁰		26 50
21	Life Insurance		11 66
	Chicken 1 ⁵⁰ Rapes 2 ⁵⁰ 3 ⁵⁰		2 10
23	Bird feed 2 ⁵⁰ 3 ⁵⁰ 2 ⁰⁰		2 60
24	To Help young men Study for the ministry		5 00
24	Barnett's Butcher Bill		12 23
	Chamber 1 ⁰⁵ Oil Cloth 2 ²⁵		3 30
25	Octators 11 ²⁵ Roger 5 ⁰⁰		16 25
26	1 Hl Flour 9 ⁵⁰		9 50
23	of H. H. Butterworth 4 hrs 25 ⁰⁰		25 00
25	of J. C. D. D. Ministry interest		140 00
27	To M. 2 ⁰⁰ Car fare 3 ⁵⁰	405 36	98 50
9	of Mrs. R. H. Walter to M. H. Bell	00 00	
27	"C. M. & Co.	50 00	
"	To Mrs. R. H. Walter acct		19 95
	42 lbs. Butter of C. E. Powers		12 60
28	Wood 255 Fed 1375		16 30
29	Home Mission 2 ⁴⁵ In		2 45
30	In Cars 2 ⁰⁰ Candy 2 ⁰⁰ 2 ⁰⁰		3 20
31	on Hand.		00
	Amounts of month.	\$458 31	458 31

A page of Anthony's household accounts for the year 1871 illustrates his methodical habits. The smallest items are carefully recorded. Two dollars is the sum usually given "To M." in this first year of their marriage. But it is worthy of note that five dollars is subscribed "To Help young Man Study for the ministry."



The weekly "Life" published a series of drawings by Otho Cushing, under the heading "Historic Affinities." In the issue of February 9, 1911, Comstock was shown dallying with Sappho.



The New York "World" of December 30, 1914, carried a humorous story of one of Comstock's courtroom arguments. In the accompanying Frueh cartoon, the vice-hunter is shown protecting his bundle of evidence from a guard suspicious of bombs.

then, when you had succeeded, use the evidence thus obtained to convict him?"

Anthony said "Yes" to all three questions and the clergyman remarked, "Mr. Comstock has done what would be pronounced disgraceful in a policeman in a Boston Court." This apparently was the expression of a minority opinion. The meeting continued and Boston proceeded to organize along the lines suggested by Comstock.

There can be no doubt, of course, that Comstock lied in building up his case against Restell, but it is possible to be pedantic about truth-telling. Some of the activities for which Comstock was blamed seem entirely legitimate for one pledged to enforce the law. Whenever he saw advertisements which were apparently for obscene or immoral articles he sent for them. And naturally he did not sign his letters "Comstock." But this is a long way short of wheedling the reluctant into crime for the sake of an arrest. The Restell case may have been different. There is some reason to believe that the proprietor of the palace was well on the way toward the abandonment of her illegal practices at the time Comstock sought her out. She seems to have harbored higher ideals than those bound up in her business, and some who knew her well said that she was at the point of retiring and making a drive to get into New York society. At any rate, she maintained that Comstock wheedled her. In the beginning he told her of his wife and their desperate poverty. If they were to have another child, financial ruin would engulf them and their little home. It was after this sad tale that Madame Restell timidly produced her remedies.

However, it is possible that both the parties in the transaction were mean-spirited. The defense which Restell planned to make in court was to deny that she dealt in remedies for abortion or contraception. She intended to

tell the court that she was no more than a swindler and that the drugs which she dispensed were calculated to do nothing whatsoever.

Generally speaking, Comstock had no great luck among the so-called abortionists. His percentage of convictions was lower than in any of his other activities and there were many pardons. But Anthony never had the slightest misgiving about the righteousness of the course which he adopted. He seems to have been incapable of visualizing any person sincerely devoted to the cause of birth control. Indeed he was not wont to show any great amount of sensitivity in regard to the motives of those against whom he took action. They were, as he saw them, all knaves and miscreants, and there were no whites or grays among the black ranks of the sinful. Naturally he came to court with many cases which seemed to people less zealous than himself trifling and feeble. A reputable woman physician was taken into custody by him because she sold a syringe such as might be had by any customer at any drug store. Another physician, this time a man, was harried by Comstock because he wrote a book imparting a few not particularly frank facts concerning sex. And to this day it is the Comstock law which prevents the interstate shipment of many books on medical subjects which would circulate freely in any other country.

Long before his death many of Comstock's backers realized that they had not chosen an agent much gifted with discrimination. He was not one to take a hint nor did he grow wiser with experience. At the end of a long life Anthony Comstock was probably a little more intolerant than when he began his work. The most which can be said for him is that many knaves and miscreants pretended to be actuated by good motives in doing shady things. Accordingly it became the custom of Comstock to cut through

all explanations and cry, "Ah, another rogue and devil," the moment any honest motive was ever mentioned.

There were some benefits coming out of this bull-headed sort of slashing. One of the really fine achievements of Comstock was his campaign against the quacks and venders of patent medicines. He was in truth the pioneer whom Samuel Hopkins Adams followed many years later, for though Comstock bruised the serpent he did not succeed in slaying it outright. In his patent medicine campaign the vice-hunter was forced to cut his way through a great underbrush of hypocrisy. All these folk were honest in intention and benefactors of the human race—if only one would listen to what they had to say. But even the glib ones had no effect on the activities of Anthony, because he had no talent for listening. The scope of his work was somewhat curtailed by the fact that he was less animated by a desire to put spurious remedies out of business than a resolve to end advertising which seemed to him indecent since it mentioned subjects which he did not care to think about. It is interesting, though, to note that in the patent medicine campaign Comstock for the first time displays a trace of humor. Consider if you will a portion of his own book called *Frauds Exposed*:

"We had not thought," he writes, "to reproduce here a quack medicine advertisement, but the other day we came across a circular which is so unique even as a medical pamphlet that we publish a portion of it. It is a Massachusetts production and sings the praises of a pill:

The old gentleman, who is on a visit, having a Bible in his hand, as you see in the above plate, is a perfect likeness of the father of the celebrated Dr. M. You would not take him to be over sixty or sixty-five years old. But you will be surprised, when told that this fine looking old gentleman was ninety-five years old on the 20th of November, 1847. On

the 19th of the same month, he rode, and drove himself, thirty-five miles, in order to spend the birthday of his ninety-fifth year with the doctor and his interesting family. He is an extremely rich man, with an income of about five hundred thousand dollars, annually, and the owner of a number of fine, elegant ships, which sail in different directions to every part of the world.

A number of years ago this good man was very sick. He had eight of the most celebrated doctors to attend him both night and day. With all their skill, this good and pious gentleman grew worse and worse, and, finally, they gave him up, saying that it was impossible to cure him, and he would soon die. The next day, about nine o'clock in the morning, he called his wife to his bedside, saying, how painful it is to die without seeing my son, our only child. Though I have spent large amounts of money to have him educated as a doctor, after which, to have him thoroughly understand the way to cure diseases, I persuaded him to travel in far distant lands, among the savage and Indian tribes, as then he would learn their successful manner of curing diseases in nature's way, from plants and roots; the thought of my engaging him to go, as I am about to die, grieves me much. But tell my son when he returns always to supply the wants of the poor.

Here he stopped, being in great distress, but in a few minutes his pains ceased, after which he took a short nap, being the first of any amount for several days. In the afternoon he was taken with shortness of breath and supposed to be dying. The neighbors were sent for, the room was soon filled, and many prayers were offered up from the very heart of these dear Christian people, that some relief might be obtained for this good and pious man. While these prayers were ascending like sweet incense to the Throne above, and every eye was bathed in tears, a rumbling noise was heard in the distance, like a mighty chariot winding its way nearer, when all at once a fine span of horses, before a beautiful coach, stood before the door, out of which alighted a noble and elegant looking man. In a moment's time he entered the room, and embraced the hand of his dear father and mother. She clasped her arms around his neck and fainted away. The Doctor, surprised to see his father so nearly gone,

immediately went to his coach, taking therefrom various plants and roots, which he had learned from the Red Men of the forest as being good for all diseases, and immediately compounded them together, and gave them to his father, and in about two hours afterward he was very much relieved. He gave him small doses every three or four hours, just to keep his bowels regular, and have them cleanse and purify his blood. Two days after he was much better, and the third day he could walk about the room. He has occasionally taken them ever since, and now we behold him a strong, active man, and in the bloom of health, and at the age of ninety-five able to ride in one day thirty-five miles, in order to spend his birthday with this celebrated Doctor, his son.

The above astonishing cure was sounded in every ear, and re-echoed throughout the land as a most wonderful cure. Many persons afflicted with various diseases immediately applied for the Pills. So powerful in strengthening, and so wonderfully did they cure them of all their diseases, and so great was the call for the Pills, both far and near, that it was impossible for the Doctor alone to make them fast enough, as there was not a moment through the day, but there were, to say the least, eight or ten, sometimes upwards of thirty, to the office at a time, to get these Pills. So sure were they to relieve the sick, and with so much success did they cure all manner of diseases, that he entirely laid aside his former way of practicing, and prescribed them for every complaint.

The effect of the pills upon the fine old gentleman is remarkable enough in all truth, but even more extraordinary is the change wrought in Comstock by merely reading of the remedy. For the first and only time in his literary career Anthony takes on facetiousness.

All this happened some years ago [he observes]. It would not be hard to imagine a sequel to this preposterous story, something as follows: how the manufacturer of these pills has long since annexed the West Indies to his factory, utilizing the entire annual sugar crop in the preparation of his sugar coating; how he has won the gratitude of the whole nation,

having practically solved the Indian question by setting the savages to work gathering the "various roots and plants," and how the good old gentleman still lives, hale and hearty (he will be 128 years old next November), and still sends out his "elegant ships" freighted with cargoes of the priceless pills, "in different directions to every part of the world."

When Comstock first turned his attention to the advertising quacks, remedies for abortion and for contraception were freely offered in language thinly disguised. While it is true that Anthony gained comparatively few convictions, he did manage to make newspapers refuse the copy of the various fake physicians. Always his righteous indignation flamed high over these folk. On the blotter of the Society for the Suppression of Vice he has recorded of a Boston woman against whom he obtained a sentence of one year in jail,

The Restell of Boston. Was in Partnership with C. P. Powers as abortionists. Said to be his Mistress. She came in when arrested, with an elegant silk dress trimmed with lace, and Camel's hair shawl on her said to be worth from \$1,000 to \$1,500. An old she Villain.

Powers also got a year, which satisfied Comstock not at all. "Would be hard to find a deeper-dyed villain," he reports. "In Justice Should have had full extent of the law."

During this same Boston visit Comstock arrested a local physician, but failed of conviction. He indignantly informed his Society, "This old man advertised extensively in newspapers. He is reported to me as an Abortionist and has been for years, in a quiet way." Nor did Anthony's anger end with the father. He was also after the physician's son, a young man of twenty, on the ground that he had mailed some of his father's literature to prospective

patients. "He is a hard case," observes Anthony. "Ran away and got married."

In 1874 Comstock went to Chicago where he led a spirited raid upon the abortionists, making eleven arrests in three days. The consequences in court were meager. Only fines were obtained against the prisoners. In regard to one case, Comstock wrote into the office blotter, "An old man, very feeble, but an unscrupulous old villain and abortionist. The evidence was of most positive character. For some reason unknown the Judge fined the *worst Abortionists* but the smallest fine and no imprisonment."

As a matter of fact, the feeble villain's sentence was suspended on account of his age.

Of another Comstock says, "His circulars were of the very worst character. Very *loud*." While still one more in whose case Comstock failed is curiously docketed as "Occupation—sailmaker and abortionist." It is well, by the way, to observe that Anthony Comstock always used the word abortionist loosely, frequently extending it to those who dealt only in contraceptives.

He records with a good deal of satisfaction the arrest of Dr. F. E. Andrews who had just begun business in New York after some years of practice in Albany. "Crowley and self went to 360 Lexington Avenue for *Dr. F. E. Andrews*, late of Albany," he writes. "We found him at 306 East 53rd St., where we arrested him and seized about 1,500 books, 1,500 to 2,000 circulars, over 100 letters. . . . Andrews made all kinds of statements. . . . He said to his wife, 'Well, Martha, don't worry, this is the Y.M.C.A. that I have given \$50,000 to. It is God in the Constitution and Jesus Christ the head of the Nation!'" The doctor's generosity and piety seem to have had no effect in softening the heart of Comstock.

His crusades in the city of Albany received scant support

from the authorities. In his diary for May 3, 1873, he voiced the following complaint:

Arrived in Albany about 7 A.M. Got breakfast and went to attend examination before Com. Frothingham of Seth H. Hunsdon and Patterson. After the prosecution had made his case out and submitted his evidence for prosecution, the case was adjourned till June 5th instead of to go before the Grand Jury next Tuesday. I asked the Dist. Atty. why, when a case was virtually ended, he should not go before the G. J. but should adjourn it over. O, he said, it won't do to rush these cases through. We want to keep some of them over for next term. We must make them last a little for the Marshall and Commissioner's sake so they can make something out of them. I asked him if he would not put the case of E. P. Hawley, alias Dr. Pardee, before the Grand Jury. He said no. They wanted to have an examination so as to make something. He said, You are too energetic, you drive too fast, you would not give us a chance to make a thing. Well, Mr. Dist. Atty., I'm bound, if I had my say you never should make another cent at this business. He seems to be entirely on the *make* and cares very little about prosecuting these cases outside of that. Away with such men. Give us true men or none at all to fill our offices of Justice.

Most of the cases seemed to present difficulties of one sort or another. On May 8 of the same year, Comstock writes in the diary:

James wanted to see me today about L. Gardner alias E. Gardinier, whose people were all very respectably connected. I declined to compromise on any grounds with these men for if I do then I cannot stop this nefarious business. Oh, I can do nothing without the grace of God. I pray for grace and strength to govern myself and do all things decently and in order. I am so impetuous. At times I am so weak and unworthy. I often feel unworthy to even call upon the name of God. Yet I cannot doubt Him. The terrible part is away from God, groaping in darkness or by self.

In July, 1873, a difficulty of another sort came to Comstock through his activities against the abortionists:

As I was coming out of Court, Dr. Selden, 67 Amity Street, Abortionist, assaulted me and attempted to knock me down with his Cane. He said before, as I came down the stairs, that he had been laying for me and would fix me yet, that he would lay me out yet some day. He came behind me and spit in my face. Then, as I turned, he struck me with his cane causing the blood to flow freely from my head. I knocked him down and then took him by the Collar and handed him over to the Marshall. He had before this threatened my life. He is a bad man. . . . This is the first blood I have been called upon to shed for the right. My all, if necessary, if only for my blessed Redeemer.

Later in the year Comstock is horrified during the trial of Charles Mansfield in Boston.

His counsel, I am ashamed to say it [wrote Anthony], was a member of the Y.M.C.A. and an elder or Deacon in the church. Is it possible that an Abortionist can find a professing Christian who will take his blood-money and defend him in the perpetration of this disgusting and awfull practice? Horrible! Horrible! He even went so far as to say he was a member of the Y.M.C.A. and that he would not admit of me, or rather if I were to apply for membership they, meaning the Y.M.C.A., would not admit me as a member. Why? Because I arrested this abortionist by writing under a fictitious postoffice address. Does this move me? No, I was right.

But the threat of being blackballed for the Y.M.C.A. was not the heaviest blow which fell upon Comstock during this year of his activities. On November 26 he learned that his expedition to Albany had been robbed of its success. In rage and horror he writes:

In Herald today it is reported that President Grant has pardoned *Seth H. Hunsdon* and James Patterson of Albany. A more infamous outrage never was perpetrated. An Abortionist that for 7 years has carried on his business and deceived the whole community is pardoned and that through the influence of professing Christian men. Charity bids me say "through ignorance." O, that I had known of this in time to have got the facts before Grant. It would not have been granted.

Proceeding against quack advertising which did not refer to contraceptives was not easy as there was little law on the subject. Pennsylvania had a statute declaring: "It shall not be lawful to print or publish advertisements of medicines, drugs, nostrums or apparatus for the cure of secret or venereal diseases or for the cure of those diseases peculiarly appertaining to females." But even in Pennsylvania the law was not enforced, and the most reputable newspapers freely accepted advertising from the quacks. Comstock was among the first to point out the responsibility of the paper for the character of its advertising. The antagonistic attitude of the editor of the *Sunday Mercury* is an example of how unwelcome such a suggestion not infrequently was. The things which Anthony said may sound conventional enough to-day, but it was an almost revolutionary idea he expounded in asking newspapers to censor their advertising columns. Even the church periodicals were not inclined to look very hard at a piece of display copy. In *Frauds Exposed* Comstock stated his case:

The question comes here very properly. Is a newspaper justified in publishing advertisements of this character, that enable these unprincipled scoundrels to increase and aggravate the sufferings of the afflicted? When a gentleman engages in a newspaper enterprise for the sake of a livelihood for his family, does he enter some mystic circle, where he is justified in lending his position of influence, and his medium of

communication with the world, to aiding and abetting the thief, the gambler, the quack, or indeed any law breaker? But the argument is, Well, it pays. We run a newspaper to make money. If we don't take this some other paper will, and this kind of advertising pays the best, and so we take them. The question then comes if people are deceived and robbed by the advertisement in reputable papers, and the thief pays for the advertisement out of money so obtained by him, are the publishers particeps criminis, and do not these respectable gentleman at the head of the newspapers so advertising for the lawless plunderer, share with him in the spoils?

Surely, such a mighty medium, power, and agency as the enlightened press of the nineteenth century in free America, ought not to become the tool of the villain, the vampire nor the ghoul, to rob the simple-minded, honest laborer; or oppress, curse and destroy the sick and afflicted.

These were true words and they were also brave words, newspaper advertising ethics being as they were in Comstock's day. Anthony was by no means always the meddling fool. His career took the same tragic course as that of many another reformer—first the giants and then the windmills.

H. B.

CHAPTER XII

FIRES OF THE INQUISITION

IN the fall of 1882, Comstock entered a simple home in the town of Princeton, Massachusetts. A baby girl toddled into the room. Always kindly to children, the vice-hunter tried to coax her to him. But the father, motioning her away, said sternly to Comstock, "Don't pollute her by your caresses."

This father was Ezra Hervey Heywood, socialist and freethinker, whom Comstock was about to arrest for the second time, on a charge of sending obscene matter through the mail. Five years before, on the same charge, brought by the same hand, there had been another arrest, which in June of 1878 had resulted in Heywood's conviction. He had been sentenced to two years' hard labor at Dedham Jail. The following December he had been released by President Hayes; but meantime great hardship had come to the socialist's family. He was a poor man. His home had been broken up, and his wife and small children forced to depend on the charity of friends.

Naturally enough, Heywood regarded with bitterness the instigator of his misfortunes. But something more than bitterness animated the father when he motioned back little Psyche Ceres. By 1882, Anthony Comstock inspired in thousands of people an emotion little short of horror.

Let us examine the case of this man, Ezra Heywood. At the time of his first arrest, he was already nearly fifty years of age. In his youth he had been a member of the

Congregational Church and had instructed a Bible class. The writings of Theodore Parker altered an early intention of studying for the ministry. Heywood left the church. On his graduation from Brown University, he poured his young fervor into the anti-slavery movement—though, as a non-resistant pacifist, he did not favor the Civil War. Later he devoted himself to labor reform on which he lectured and wrote, issuing from his little press at Princeton numerous pamphlets and a monthly journal, *The Word*.

His wife, like himself, was a reformer of the old abolitionist type. They believed in woman suffrage, and advocated temperance. In 1873 Heywood was active in forming an organization called "The New England Free Love League," and from that year, discarding the A.D. notation of time, he dated his letters and other writings "Y.L."—the Year of Love.

In Princeton, Heywood was esteemed. The neighbors did not share his peculiar views, but they respected his earnestness and integrity and industry. The little Massachusetts town was the socialist's birthplace, and there he had spent the twenty-five years since his graduation from the university. On the occasion of this third arrest on the charge of obscenity—brought this time in the State courts—his fellow citizens petitioned the District Attorney that the indictment against "a respected townsman and neighbor" might rest. They declared that Heywood's publications were not obscene, but "earnest expressions of his opinions, as plain speaking was characteristic of the radical abolitionists he formerly served with."

How did it happen that this eccentric, humorless soul was repeatedly arrested on a charge of obscenity? In 1876 Heywood had published a pamphlet, *Cupid's Yokes*, which contained his views on love and marriage. This dull little sociological treatise, filled with antiquated phrases about

"legalized prostitution" and "relics of barbarism," was considered by Anthony Comstock "too foul for description." It is fair to say that Anthony's was not the only protest which its earnest arguments aroused; and, though the words "cupid's yokes" are contained in a poem by Isaac Watts, the Springfield *Republican* had suggested that Heywood ought to be imprisoned for selecting so salacious a title.

Comstock's antipathy was always provoked by the expression of unconventional social and sexual views. But Heywood's pamphlet also contained some strictures on Anthony himself. On leaving Brown University, Heywood had made a graduating address on Milton's speech "For the Liberty of Unlicens'd Printing." To him the Comstock law of 1873 was a monstrous interference with personal liberty. *Cupid's Yokes* referred to the vice-hunter as "a *religio-monomaniac*, whom the mistaken will of Congress and the lascivious fanaticism of the Young Men's Christian Association have empowered to use the Federal courts to suppress free inquiry. The better sense of the American public," the pamphlet declared, "moves to repeal the National Gag-Law which he now administers. . . ."

Certainly no ordinary disapproval animated Comstock in his pursuit of Ezra Heywood. His book, *Traps for the Young*, in the chapter "Free-Love Traps," contains a lively description of Heywood's first arrest, made in November, 1877, while the former abolitionist was addressing a convention of his free-love organization in Boston.

I looked over the audience of about 250 men and boys [Anthony writes]. I could see lust in every face. After a little, the wife of the president (the person I was after) took the stand, and delivered the foulest address I ever heard. She seemed lost to all shame. The audience cheered and applauded. It was too vile; I had to go out.

Discretion forbade his making his arrest in the hall, in the presence of Heywood's sympathizers. Yet—

Every manly instinct cried out against my cowardly turning my back on this horde of lusters. I determined to try. I resolved that one man in America at least should enter a protest. . . . I returned to the hall. This chieftain's wife continued her offensive tirade against common decency. Occasionally she referred to "that Comstock." Her husband presided with great self-complacency. You would have thought he was the champion of some majestic cause instead of a mob of free-lusters. I sat down again in the audience. The stream of filth continued until it seemed to me I could not sit a moment longer.

At this moment, Heywood went from the stage into the anteroom, and Comstock followed him. Armed with a warrant for his arrest, the vice-hunter refused to let Heywood return to the hall. The doorkeeper brought the latter's hat and coat and summoned Mrs. Heywood. Anthony was growing apprehensive that the crowd would attempt a rescue. Mrs. Heywood asked him to wait while she returned to the hall, so that she might accompany her husband to jail, but "I felt obliged," Anthony comments, "out of respect to my wife, sisters, and lady friends, to decline the kind offer of her (select) company. It was about all I wanted to do," he adds, "to have one of that slimy crowd in charge." Propelling Heywood by the back of the neck, Comstock started down the stairs. Hearing the noise of the crowd in pursuit, he rushed him to the street and into a waiting carriage, which drove them to Charles Street Jail. "Thus, reader," concludes the story, "the devil's trapper was trapped."

The charge in this first arrest, which resulted in Heywood's conviction, was based on his having sent through the mail *Cupid's Yokes* and a medical book, Trall's *Sexual*

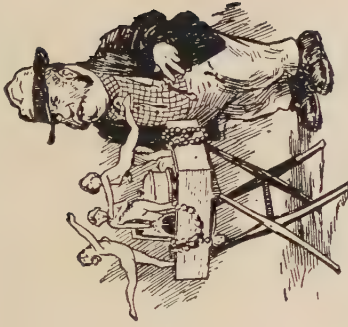
Physiology. During his term in Dedham Jail, an indignation meeting was held in Faneuil Hall to protest against "the injury done to the freedom of the press" by his conviction and imprisonment. This meeting took place on August 1, 1878, the anniversary of the emancipation of the slaves in the West Indies, and for many former abolitionists in the audience the date held an emotional significance. It was said that six thousand persons entered the hall in the course of the long and enthusiastic meeting. The speakers condemned obscenity, but opposed both Comstock and the repressive Federal legislation which he had instituted and under which Heywood had been convicted. There were also protests against the alleged injustice of Heywood's trial before Judge Daniel Clark of the United States Circuit Court in Boston. Acting on the instructions of the district attorney, the grand jury had declared that *Cupid's Yokes* was too "obscene, lewd and lascivious" to be placed upon the records of the court. Judge Clark was held to have unfairly discriminated against the prisoner. He had ruled that to establish Heywood's guilt the pamphlet need not be considered obscene throughout, but only in part; and his charge to the jury, in which he had stated that, if Heywood's ideas were followed, Massachusetts would become a vast house of prostitution, was declared by the socialist's adherents to be equivalent to instructions to convict. In the course of the indignation meeting, resolutions, asking for the release of Heywood and the dismissal of Comstock by the Post Office, were forwarded to President Hayes.

The presidential pardon, granted late in 1878, was a cause of deep distress to Comstock.

The Pres. pardons this man on the petition of Infidels and liberals, free lovers and Smutt dealers, in the face of a solemn protest signed by the officers of our Soc. and an affidavit



The drawing shown above adorned the cover of "Life" of September 27, 1906. St. Peter is represented as saying, "No, Anthony, no. We may have things here you would object to."



Still another drawing depicted Comstock as a pedlar of bric-a-brac. From "Life," November 1 1906.



(Right) Anthony's raids on literature were the inspiration of a cartoon in the New York "World" of January 7, 1898. At that time, the reformer had just been awarded a verdict of six cents in a suit for defamation of character.



One of the many cartoons which followed Comstock's raid on the Art Students' League showed Public Opinion booting Anthony on behalf of the artists. From "Life," August 30, 1906.



"Let Anthony's Punishment Fit the Crime" was the caption of another cartoon ridiculing the reformer's attack on the artists. Comstock is shown in the embarrassing rôles of art student and of model in a life class. From "Life," September 13, 1906.

setting forth the fact that Heywood was openly defying the law through his friends, and by their selling his book while he was in Jail. [Thus runs the entry in Comstock's office blotter.] This action of Pres. Hayes [he continues] practically licenses the sale of Cupid's Yokes, and is a strong encouragement for others to violate the law, as well as a great hinderance to the further enforcement of the law.

Anthony's chagrin was the greater because another trial, based on the mailing of Heywood's pamphlet, was pending in December, 1878. This was the case of DeRobigné M. Bennett, a stout and elderly New York publisher whose liberal views had awakened in Comstock a bitter determination to enforce silence upon him. In a little office on Eighth Street, Bennett edited *The Truth Seeker*, of which free-thought weekly he was the founder. He was a prolific and controversial writer.

Publishes most horrible and obscene blasphemies [is the blotter's comment on Bennett]. Also indecent tracts that purport to be scientific. Also quack medical books. . . . He is everything vile in Blasphemy and Infidelism. His idea of Liberty is to do and say as he pleases without regard to the rights, morals or liberties of others.

Comstock had had an earlier encounter with Bennett. In November, 1877, a few days after his first arrest of Heywood, he had visited the office of *The Truth Seeker*, in company with a deputy United States marshal, and arrested the publisher on the charge of sending obscene matter through the mails. The obscene matter consisted of two tracts; one was a heretical little pamphlet written by Bennett himself, called *An Open Letter to Jesus Christ*; and the other, the work of a clergyman named Bradford, was a scientific treatise on the propagation of marsupials!

But, however much Anthony was outraged by these pamphlets, he was unable to bring Bennett to trial for having

mailed them. The case was eventually dismissed, presumably on instructions from Washington. Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll, the famous agnostic, had written the Postmaster-General on his friend's behalf, enclosing the two pamphlets which had caused Bennett's arrest.

Comstock, according to Bennett, continued to pursue him "like a bloodhound." For his part, the elderly publisher did not suffer in silence. *The Truth Seeker* was a convenient vehicle for the recital of Anthony's oppressions. In *The Champions of the Church; Their Crimes and Persecutions*, a volume of more than a thousand pages, published in 1878, Bennett included a chapter on the crusader. This chapter was also published as a pamphlet, under the title *Anthony Comstock, His Career of Cruelty and Crime*. Here Bennett expressed his conviction that Comstock's enmity for himself was based on his unorthodox religious views, the obscenity statute serving merely as a pretext. In a series of sketches he outlined the stories of many of the vice-hunter's prosecutions, including his own, that of Heywood and that of Madame Restell, alleging that all these arrests had been inspired by a spirit of malign and bigoted cruelty.

Bennett had moreover been engaged in an energetic campaign against the repressive postal legislation. In a circular addressed to "the Publishers, Booksellers, Editors, Importers, Druggists, Artists, Physicians and the Lovers of Liberty and Justice in the United States," he had argued that these statutes were "capable of being easily construed so as to bear with excessive severity upon many of the best and most loyal citizens of the country." The statutes were held to be unconstitutional; and it was pointed out the crime of obscenity was incapable of exact definition. A copy of a petition, asking for the repeal of the statutes, was enclosed, and the recipient was urged to procure as many

signatures as possible. According to Bennett, no less than 15,000 of these circulars and petitions were sent out.

The pages of *The Truth Seeker* had burned with appeals for the principle of American liberty, and by February, 1878, it was claimed that the petition had accumulated 70,000 signatures, headed by the name of Robert G. Ingersoll. It was placed on an immense reel and taken to Washington, where it was introduced in the House of Representatives by General Butler—the same General Butler who in 1873 had so keenly interested himself in obscenity legislation.

The opponents of the Comstock laws were for the most part uninfluential. But the sheer force of numbers brought wide attention to their cause, and Ingersoll's name lent some weight to the petition. Certain Washington newspapers favored it, and the liberal press throughout the country was vigorous in its support. The Jeffersonian newspapers, moreover, upheld the contention that such legislation was unconstitutional, an invasion of State rights—questions of common morality and crime belonging to the jurisdiction of the States. On the other hand, many newspapers which would not take a general stand against postal legislation were convinced that the laws, as they stood, entrusted a dangerous degree of power to an individual.

It was a moment fraught with danger for the friends of the Comstock laws. In March the petitioners' committee secured a hearing before the House Committee on the Revision of the Laws. Accompanied by Mr. Samuel Colgate, Anthony hastened to Washington. All his energy, all his driving force, all the prestige of righteousness and all the influence of those Christian laymen were thrown into the fray. In *Frauds Exposed* he freely acknowledges the strength of the opposition which he met. Is he perhaps a shade too ready to acknowledge it? As we read his

account of the controversy, we are tempted to suspect that his instinct for the dramatic led him to paint the scene in heightened colors. It must have been an alluring picture that he saw: the solitary champion of childhood, the forces of lust and crime, the losing battle—the eventual triumph of the cause of purity.

Everything looked black. I was alone. As I strolled through the vestibule and rotunda of the Capitol, the Senate Chamber, and Representatives Hall, I found on each Congressman's desk a copy of the vile paper, of which eight pages were devoted to a pretended account of the "Life and Crimes of Anthony Comstock." [This was the work of Dr. Selden whom Comstock had arrested in 1872.] These papers were scattered everywhere. The Committee room was filled with them. As I entered the Committee room, I found it crowded with long-haired men and short-haired women, there to defend obscene publications, abortion implements, and other incentives to crime by repealing the laws. I heard their hiss and curse as I passed through them. I saw their sneers and their looks of derision and contempt. But one man, he a member of this Committee, in all that audience, had the moral courage to rise up and in the face of this tremendous opposition speak to me, and greet me pleasantly. It was a brave act, and I shall always honor the memory of HON. RUSH CLARK OF IOWA, for daring to speak a kind word to me in the darkest hour of my experience.

The friends of repeal first addressed the Committee on the Revision of the Laws. Anthony's refutation was hot and eloquent.

I then presented facts [we read in *Frauds Exposed*], why the laws should not be changed. I showed how catalogues of schools are collected for the sake of children's names and addresses; how different devices are resorted to, to collect the names of our youth in order to send secretly by mail to them, the most demoralizing articles, giving details and sad instances coming within my own knowledge, where many youth of both sexes have been ruined.

In a blaze of righteous indignation, he showed that certain endorsements attached to the circular which Bennett had sent out to secure signatures to the petition had been used without the authorization of the persons concerned. Bennett later declared that Comstock had by intimidation forced these persons to retract. But, whatever the truth, the argument was effective. Or perhaps the committee was moved by the time-worn plea on behalf of the youth of the country. It unanimously reported against any repeal or change in the law, being persuaded that "the post office was not established to carry instruments of vice, or obscene writings, indecent pictures or lewd books." In the Senate, where a similar petition had been referred to the Judiciary Committee, no action was taken.

At its convention, held at Syracuse, New York, the following September, the National Liberal League—an organization of freethinkers formed in Philadelphia in 1876—was split over the question of the repeal of the postal laws, a minority of the delegates, including the president, Mr. Francis E. Abbot, withdrawing because they favored only modification of the existing legislation. A strong advocate of repeal, the Honorable Elizur Wright of Boston (a former abolitionist who had furnished bail for Ezra Heywood on his arrest in 1877) succeeded Mr. Abbot as president. In September, 1879, the League's convention in Cincinnati adopted resolutions opposing the dissemination of obscene literature, but favoring postal laws which would allow the circulation of all printed matter, irrespective of the religious, irreligious, political or scientific views it contained. But with the petition of 1878 the liberals had shot their bolt. Though the Comstock laws were held in detestation by many and though harassing little attacks were intermittently made against them, propaganda for their repeal was thereafter sporadic and easily defeated.

By the time the delegates of the National Liberal League were assembling in Cincinnati, their confrère, D. M. Bennett, was in a very unfortunate situation indeed. In August of 1878, there had been a convention of liberals at Watkins, New York. Ezra Heywood was in Dedham Jail, and his wife's sister had brought a number of his pamphlets to the convention, in hopes of making a little money for his family. While she was absent for a few moments from the table on which these pamphlets were spread, Bennett sold on her behalf a copy of *Cupid's Yokes*. He was immediately arrested under the New York law on a charge of selling obscene literature.

Though this arrest was instigated by Watkins moralists, Bennett contended that Comstock was indirectly responsible for it. Perhaps, as the old publisher's enemies suggested, he wanted to pose as a martyr to the spirit of bigotry. Certainly he soon put himself in the way of another arrest. In the pages of *The Truth Seeker*, he stated that, though he had hitherto taken little interest in Heywood's treatise, not being in full sympathy with its views, he was now ready to send *Cupid's Yokes* through the mails to everybody who wanted it. "It was not written," he later said, "to excite passion, but to elicit thought. It is not a pamphlet the young would read, being dry and prosy."

Among the many orders which Bennett received was one from Granville, New York, signed with the name "G. Brackett." This Brackett professed himself a poor but earnest admirer of Bennett's teachings. He ordered several tracts, including "a copy of that Heywood book you advertise Cupid's something or other, you know what I mean. I send three and a half dollars," the letter concluded, "and if that ain't enough I will send the balance when I get the books. Wish that I had three hundred times the amount, but I hain't."

In this effusive document we may discern the fine hand of our crusader. Bennett sent the pamphlets and was presently arrested. In March, 1879, he was tried in the United States Circuit Court, Judge Charles L. Benedict presiding. Expert testimony as to the character of Heywood's pamphlet was, as usual in obscenity cases, not permitted. The defense was not allowed to show by the evidence of the author what his intentions were in writing *Cupid's Yokes*. Judge Benedict also ruled against admitting evidence regarding the authors consulted in writing the pamphlet, the classification of the work by book-dealers, the appearance of similar material in books never disturbed by the vice-hunters, or the length of time the pamphlet had been on the market without being molested. The defense was not allowed to show that the pamphlet had been, as obscene works are not, sold at a uniformly low price—fifteen cents. Certain sections of *Cupid's Yokes* had been marked by the district attorney. To these sections, and to these alone, was the attention of the jury directed. The court ruled that the general scope of the book was not in issue; and the gentlemen of the jury were instructed to take the definition of obscenity—that is, anything having a tendency to suggest impure and libidinous thoughts to the young and inexperienced—from the court. Bennett was convicted, and sentenced to thirteen months' imprisonment at hard labor.

He had raised a loud cry of persecution for opinion, maintaining that his arrest had been due to the fact that he was one of the largest infidel publishers in the country. In this opinion, the "repeal" element of the National Liberal League concurred, and Bennett was regarded by thousands as a martyr to the cause of free thought and free speech. He claimed that 200,000 people petitioned President Hayes for his pardon. The first petition was speedily laid before

the President, while Bennett was still in Ludlow Street Jail.

But presidential clemency was not a part of Anthony Comstock's program. Too often in the seven years of his work had it intervened to curtail the punishment of offenders convicted in the United States courts. So once more the forces of righteousness were rallied. Rutherford B. Hayes was a religious man. His wife was a particularly ardent adherent of Methodism. Clergymen, imploring that Bennett should not be released from prison, began to make themselves heard in Washington; and numerous Sunday School children, between the ages of eight and fifteen years, added their earnest supplications in the form of a long petition to Mrs. Hayes. Her pastor contributed the weight of his influence. The President faltered. His was a difficult position. Only a few months before he had signed a pardon releasing from Dedham Jail the author of *Cupid's Yokes*, convicted for the very crime for which Bennett was now imprisoned. If Ezra Heywood might go free, why should Bennett remain a prisoner? And Attorney-General Charles Devens held it as his opinion that the pamphlet, though an undesirable publication, was not obscene. Then Comstock descended upon Washington, armed with a bundle of indiscreet letters which the old publisher, married for some twenty years, had written to a woman. He got the presidential ear, and Hayes hesitated no longer. The petitions of the liberals were denied, and Bennett was sent to the penitentiary at Albany.

If he had aspired to martyrdom in the cause of liberty, his ambition was now most bitterly realized. He was a man of more than sixty, stout, in failing health. The privations of prison life bore harshly on him. In December, 1879, he became so ill that his wife feared that he was dying. Armed with petitions, bearing some thirty thousand

signatures not previously submitted, she hastened to Washington and tearfully implored the President to grant her husband's pardon. She thought that he seemed touched by the story of Bennett's condition. But nothing came of her appeal. In January, 1880, at the annual meeting of the Society for the Suppression of Vice in the Y.M.C.A. rooms, there was great rejoicing at the firmness which Hayes had shown. This "pious pow-wow," according to Bennett, resembled a "war-dance, when, after a victory is over, some fellow-Indians meet together to torture their captives and exult in savage joy over the victory they have gained."

Bennett did not die in the Albany Penitentiary. Upheld by the sympathy and the financial contributions of his many supporters, he completed his term, providing *The Truth Seeker* with a monthly letter filled with virulent attacks on the bigotry and injustice which had convicted him.

His release was celebrated at a large reception at Chicker-ing Hall, New York. In August, 1880, he made a trip to Europe, which was partly financed by his generous friends. His death occurred in 1882. In Greenwood Cemetery, Brooklyn, a monument erected to his memory was inscribed "The Defender of Liberty and Its Martyr." Beneath a medallion of his heavy head with its flowing beard, is carved a design which shows the sword of persecution broken by the pen.

In the fall of the year that Bennett died, Comstock arrested Ezra Heywood for the second time, and in April, 1883, the case was tried in the United States Court in Boston, Judge T. L. Nelson presiding.

There were four counts in the indictment found against Heywood. The first concerned the inevitable *Cupid's Yokes*. The second was based on *The Word Extra*, which consisted of two poems from Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*—

"To a Common Prostitute" and "A Woman Waits for Me." The third and fourth counts were based on an advertisement in Heywood's magazine, *The Word*, of an article waggishly called "The Comstock Syringe."

Following a course similar to that taken in Heywood's former trial, the Grand Jury had declared *Cupid's Yokes* and the Whitman poems "too grossly obscene and lewd to be placed on the records of the court." In other words, the jury before which Heywood was to be tried was in these two instances to take the decision regarding obscenity from the prosecution. But this was not Judge Daniel Clark's court, nor that of Judge Charles L. Benedict. Judge Nelson threw out the first two counts, on the grounds that the allegation in the indictment was untrue; and Heywood was tried on the sole charge of having published the syringe advertisement.

The elderly advocate of free love appeared in his own defense. His speech, mainly a recital of his views, consumed four and a half hours. He held that he had offended no one, and was being persecuted for his opinions. Comstock's enmity to him he ascribed to the fact that in *Cupid's Yokes* he had been the first to move the repeal of the postal legislation, and that he had worked to that end for seven years. A few remarks on personal hygiene completed his defense. The jury voted "Not Guilty," and a large audience received the verdict with manifest delight. This was not Heywood's last arrest, but Anthony Comstock did not trouble him again.

He should have learned by this time that his assaults upon the liberal-minded, the freethinkers and the authors of medical works were to be forays which cost him strategically far more than he could gain. But this lesson, despite the weight of experience, was one which he could only incompletely assimilate. The frequent statement that Comstock

could not discriminate between a frankly pornographic book and a sociological or medical publication of educational character was fair criticism. To the vice-hunter reference to the body or its functions or questioning of the social regulations governing those functions was always sinful. If, instead of the furtive snicker designed to bring a high price from seekers after prohibited indecencies, the treatment was pre-tentious, earnest, professedly scientific—so much the worse. In Anthony's eyes the semblance of virtuous intention contributed to vice only the added obloquy of hypocrisy. The fight for the young must go forward.

The fight for the young! The phrase was always on Comstock's lips, and we have been convinced that the issue lay near his heart. But, with the passing years, may it not have become a formula with which he sustained himself, unconscious that its relation to his work was growing increasingly remote? Comstock was not an analytical man. He was a doer, not a thinker; a man of passionate action, not a searcher of motives and causes. Yet it seems hard to believe that even such a man could have thought that the prosy pages of *Cupid's Yokes* held a serious menace to the immature.

But we must not speak of Anthony Comstock as a man who stood alone. Those good gentlemen of the Society for the Suppression of Vice to whom he submitted every case before proceeding with it, must in some measure share in any criticism levelled against him. They were all, perhaps,—the Christian laymen and their agent, alike—fed and inspired by a consciousness of power. They were moved to develop to its fullest extent the adventurous field of public activity into which they had stepped. They had considerably broadened the scope of their work—forays against quack advertising, against swindling schemes, against dime novels and story papers, against gambling and horse

rating, and against the circulation of medical information and unorthodox social views now formed an important part of their program.

They must always be attitudinizing as purifiers of society. If the nests of crime and vice are trampled out, and the funds begin to fall low, they must try and make their subscribers think there are nests where there are none; and, knowing well how unpopular Freethinkers are, how few friends they have in high places, they found among them a book which repeated the details of ordinary physiological and medical books—a book whose pages, with all their faults, are nowhere of biblical impurity. . . . The old privilege of the orthodox to imprison their opponents—the privilege so loved, but lost—must seem about to come back again, when it has been decided that facts familiar in the libraries of medicine and science cannot be printed by Freethinkers in a form accessible to the people without punishment.

These words were spoken in London by Moncure D. Conway, the rationalist preacher, on the occasion of the imprisonment of Edward Truelove. He was referring to the British Society for the Suppression of Vice. Yet how aptly his words fit the New York Society which, modelled on the British original, seems faithfully to have followed its development.

According to Comstock's own statement, the library of obscenity current at the outset of his work was comprised of 165 publications. In 1872, in those early energetic raids on the four publishers, he had already dried the source of most of this material. By 1876, the plates of 160 of the original publications had been destroyed. The annual report of the Society for the Suppression of Vice for 1877 contained the admission that little capital was being invested in publishing obscene works, and that large seizures among the dealers could no longer be expected. In only two instances during 1880 did agents of the Society find copies

of books included in those 165 titles. The report for that year further conceded that not one in ten of those advertising obscene matter actually possessed anything of the kind. The streets of New York were almost free of pedlars of indecent articles, and the shop-windows had been largely purged of their unseemly displays. By the end of 1881, the Society had only twenty pounds of obscene books to report, and a paltry packet of twenty-five improper pictures had been destroyed. To be sure, there had been that year a large haul of over sixty thousand circulars, catalogues, songs and poems; but in the following year this classification fell to the negligible number of fifty. Clearly the fight for purity was not what it had been. Obscenity was illustrating the law of diminishing returns.

While I would not deny the good your Society has done in driving this literature from the market [wrote D. M. Bennett to Samuel Colgate], I must remind you that the far greater portion of this was done before your Society was organized, and before the postal laws of '73 were enacted. Since that time, your Society has expended some \$50,000, and it has done in the last five years little else than to prosecute, annoy and persecute people who have meant to do no harm, who have broken no moral law, and have done nothing to injure their fellowmen.

These words are quoted from a pamphlet, *An Open Letter to Samuel Colgate*, issued in 1879 by *The Truth Seeker* press. It furnishes one more document in the portfolio of abuse of Anthony Comstock. The reputation of legendary and implacable power he had achieved with gargantuan steps. He was still in his thirties; an upright man, a religious man, a man with the Puritan conscience honored by his countrymen. Yet he was hated as few men have been hated; and we remember that, when the shafts of enmity first stung him, he found comfort in re-

calling that men had hated his Master, too. All his life he was to see himself as a man crucified for his love of purity, for his protection of the young. Yet, quite plainly, his war on obscene literature was not the cause of the mighty outcry raised against him. The friends of commercialized pornography were few. They could never have secured an honorable hearing. There is no inspiration for the hearts of men in bargaining for smutty stories. But "liberty of the press" is a battle-cry. "Free speech" is a challenge. For "the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely, according to conscience," men may be found ready to fight and suffer.

Comstock had been so unwise as to make a few martyrs. In his attacks on the freethinkers, moreover, he had once more brought the Federal postal legislation into prominence. He failed to recognize that the belief that the Constitution had guaranteed them freedom of thought and of speech was as much a part of the emotional tradition of his fellow Americans as was their sympathy with the enforcement of pure-mindedness. If they were interested in defending obscenity, they could not admit it—their desire for improper books and pictures must have been furtive and shamefaced. But when the cry was raised of persecution for opinion's sake, they could be rallied by high and noble words; and men who remembered their Milton were ready to remind them that "though all the windes of doctrin were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licencing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength."

Comstock's error had been grave; it had further consequences even more painful to himself than the noble cause with which he had armed his opponents. The purveyors of indecent matter—the basement book-dealers and the street pedlars and the boys behind the news-stands—were

not only obscure and dishonored. They were largely inarticulate. But the freethinkers and the former abolitionists, the doctors, the members of the National Liberal League had legions of words at their command. Conroy might slash the vice-hunter's cheek—on his good name these others left deeper scars. The writings of D. M. Bennett are a passionate accusation of Comstock, not only as unjust and fanatical and bigoted, but as cruel and relentless—the inhuman fiend from the pollution of whose caresses Ezra Heywood motioned back the little Psyche Ceres.

Some of this ignominy fell on the Christian laymen of Comstock's society, as well. That organization was dubbed the "Society for the Manufacture and Suppression of Vice." A humorous aspect of the Bennett case was the exposure by the old publisher of the fact that, in a pamphlet issued by the house of Colgate to advertise the merits of its vase-line, directions had been given for the use of that emollient as a method of birth control. Bennett's disclosure brought about the withdrawal of the pamphlet. It was said that, under his influence, freethinkers throughout the country boycotted for years the products of Colgate and Company.

One of the most practical forms taken by this section of the opposition was the formation of the National Defense Association, organized to combat the efforts of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, and especially to arrange for the defense of persons arrested. This association functioned for many years, and contrived to cause the Society no small amount of worry and trouble.

But to dwell on the Society, as such, apart from the person of its agent, is to misrepresent the case. Inevitably Comstock was the chief object of animosity and ridicule. No other person connected with the cause of purity was so forthright, so colorful, so extravagant and fanatical. The

square, energetic figure, the passionate, whiskered face—here, at least, was a symbol, a caricature, a physical embodiment of the entire cause of purity and Puritanism. The peculiar hatred in which Comstock was held was stimulated in many quarters by an abhorrence of his methods. In securing evidence for arrests under the Federal statute, he was wont to write to his victims under an assumed name; and, as we have seen, no little ingenuity sometimes went into the composition of these letters. In his correspondence with Heywood, too, he had permitted his imagination to operate: in one letter, he had masqueraded as a free lover; in another, pretending to be a labor reformer, he had requested Heywood's prices for a lecture in Nyack. His dramatic nature was not satisfied with such routine deceit as would conceivably have answered his purpose. Comstock did some very fancy misrepresentation. Inevitably, when this was exposed, his reputation suffered, and he was accused of lying for the pure love of it. "You may search all the annals of crime," said one of the speakers at the Faneuil Hall indignation meeting on behalf of Ezra Heywood, "and you may search in vain for a professional informer and spy that did not ultimately turn out to be an infernal scoundrel."

His first choice of an assistant to aid him in his work had been an unfortunate one. This assistant, one Britton, received the bitterest denunciation as an *agent provocateur*. It is difficult to judge the value of the envenomed accounts of Britton's methods. But it is certain that two of the men whose convictions aroused a storm of complaint, Charles Blandin, a young news-dealer, and a confectioner called Louis Wengenwrath, were both pardoned by the Governor of New York. Britton had been connected with the Society since 1875. Though Comstock long defended him, there is reason to believe that his judgment was blinded by Britton's

conspicuous zeal for making arrests. At length he must have been disillusioned, for Britton was dismissed. But, long before the rupture occurred, the assistant had succeeded in doing Comstock and his society much harm. In the general mind, his offenses were lumped with those of his superior in one vast succession of injustice and persecution. Stories of families in want, of an invalid wife left desolate while her husband languished in a cell, of an old man dragged off to jail in his shirt-sleeves, of arrests made late on Saturday when it was impossible to procure bail—such tales may have been exaggerated in the telling, but they must have been believed.

For his part, the vice-hunter did little to dispel the impression that he took a cruel, an almost savage satisfaction in bringing to justice the violators of the laws which he had made his especial concern. Often in his pursuit of culprits he spoke and acted vengefully. He made no effort to conceal his rabid hatred of Heywood, Bennett and the other freethinkers, and it is evident that this hatred was enhanced by horror at their want of a proper religious feeling. In both his books, *Frauds Exposed* and *Traps for the Young*, he unjustly attacked Robert Ingersoll. The fact that this "blasphemer" should be widely respected, should have influence, could get people to pay to hear him lecture—these things drove him into a frenzy. For Anthony, in war all things were fair. He fought with teeth and claws. To him the liberals and the freethinkers were always "smut-dealers" and "ex-convicts." He would grant no decent motive in their opposition to the postal legislation. They were merely, according to Comstock, defending "this their dear obscenity." More especially in *Traps for the Young* does he express himself violently on this score. The language is often coarse. Stung to the quick by the hostility which

he aroused, Comstock's passionate nature expressed itself in vulgar invective, in jeers and taunts, in the display of an almost savage pleasure in catching his victims and procuring for them a severe sentence.

Yet this man was throughout his life a disciple of the meek and gentle Jesus. In 1873 he had reproached himself for speaking sharply to a servant, because such severity was unworthy a follower of the Master. Arrogant though he was, we know that he was often torn by self-distrust. In *Frauds Exposed*, he naïvely confesses, "I am not perfect; I am conscious of much that is weak and wrong in my own life."

Always, with profound sincerity, this man believed himself dedicated to God's service. Always he was fighting the enemies of righteousness, always he was armed for the protection of the young. Yet through the texture of his high intention breaks the relentless iron of his thwarted and passionate nature. As the years pass, this has become more and more dreadfully evident, until we can scarcely believe that this is that same man who, less than ten years ago, poured into his diary so much of fervent piety, so much of humble supplication and earnest yearning for guidance.

Yet men do not greatly change. The signs of their destiny are written early, if we have eyes to read them. It comes to mind that the early statistics of the Society listed certain deaths among Comstock's accomplishments. And there was a letter which he sent to Representative Merriam in January, 1873. "There were four publishers on the 2nd of last March," he wrote; "today three of these are in their graves, and it is charged by their friends that I worried them to death. Be that as it may, I am sure that the world is better off without them."

When we read that the crusader boasted that Madame

Restell was the fifteenth person whom he had driven to suicide, those words of 1873 return with a ring that is somehow sinister. "This," wrote Ezra Heywood in *Cupid's Yokes*—"this is clearly the spirit that lighted the fires of the Inquisition."

M. L.

CHAPTER XIII

SNIPING AT LADY LUCK

THERE is every reason to believe that Anthony Comstock might have grown rich by the simple process of not looking in the direction of the Louisiana Lottery. To be sure it blazoned itself across the life of the city and handled daily vast sums of money. No deft detective work was needed to obtain the evidence against the concern. The business was brisk and open. And from one point of view Anthony was not heroic in refusing the bribes offered to him. Constitutionally he was incapable of making any such deal. In matters of this sort his honesty was so rock-ribbed that it is fair to say he was not even tempted.

Still, large sums were dangled before his eyes. A lawyer for the lottery company called at Comstock's office and expressed the hope that Mr. Comstock was a reasonable man. Of course, he was not, in either the best or worst sense of the word. Briefly the lawyer explained that he had taken an interest in—one might almost say a fancy to—Anthony, and he wanted to help him and the Society for the Suppression of Vice. As a tangible evidence of this good-will, he asked to be allowed the privilege of giving \$25,000 every year to the Society. This payment, he promised, would be made within forty-eight hours and, for the sake of convenience, the check and all the checks to follow would be made out in the name "A. Comstock."

No specific return was demanded for this courtesy. The

lawyer merely was going on the chance that some sort of mutual good-will and satisfaction might be built up through the transaction. Certainly, Comstock could have used the money. He was in debt at the moment and his house was mortgaged. Still, he found no difficulty whatsoever in refusing. Nor was he one to let the dramatic possibilities of the situation slip by. Though he went almost never to the theater there was an undeniably stage-struck streak in Anthony. At least there is no doubt that he dramatized himself. The scene was played out like a good situation in a melodrama. Comstock heard the tempter with rapt attention and seeming courtesy. Then he rose and pointed rather theatrically toward the door.

"As long as I live and have my reason and health," thundered Anthony, "your company shall never have another office open in New York."

The lottery people were not particularly shrewd. Though the young man from Connecticut read the line with every resonance of sincerity in his tones, the lawyer went back to report that he was bluffing. The friendly balm of lottery bribes had been widely spread about the town. The police were said to receive as much as \$5,000 a month for protection; since the net profits of a single day amounted approximately to this sum, the company could easily afford it. Comstock's refusal was not taken seriously, and in a day or so the lawyer was back with a better proposition. This time he suggested a trip to Europe. He felt that travel would be good for both Mr. and Mrs. Comstock. Maybe he mentioned its broadening influence, though he was probably smart enough not to speak of the splendid opportunity Anthony would have to visit the great art galleries of Europe, filled with pictures and statuary which Comstock described in one of his books as "classical traps." The agent

of the Louisiana Lottery asked leave to assume that the Comstocks could travel comfortably for \$20,000 a year. Five years seemed to him just about the time one should take to see Europe, without any rush or bustle. This sum would be handed to the travellers the moment they reached the gangplank of the liner.

If Comstock made any suitable reply to this proposition, history does not record it. However, he expressed his refusal this time in terms which convinced the lottery crowd he could not be bribed. And now they tried another tack and pulled wires at Washington in an effort to have him removed. Comstock's plan of campaign against the Louisiana Lottery and all others functioning in New York State was courageous. He found that obtaining convictions was not as easy as it seemed. Nothing was to be hoped for from the police. The place of business of the Louisiana Lottery was at 212 Broadway, the concern occupying two floors over Knox's hat store. No password of any sort was needed. At the height of the rush, around the luncheon hour, the line of prospective ticket takers extended all the way down two flights of stairs and into the street where policemen were stationed to preserve order.

But as soon as Comstock obtained warrants and went to serve them, he found the establishment tightly shut. Next time he proceeded with more secrecy. A sudden descent upon the place a few days later yielded 30,000 tickets and the account books. Nor was Comstock content to move directly against the lottery. Obviously its success depended largely on the amount of publicity which it could put before prospective customers. Newspapers accepted its advertising and were glad to get it. Comstock accordingly went after the papers, though he was warned that this would ruin him. In a test case he gained a favorable verdict which was upheld by the State Supreme Court. He continued to fight

the Louisiana Lottery until it was forced out of business in 1893, following the passage of a stringent Federal law forbidding lotteries the use of the mails.

More strategy was necessary for his raid against the pool-rooms of Long Island City. And here, too, there was much more fun for Comstock. Often he wrote and railed of the fearful evil done to youth by dime and nickel thrillers but some of these publications must have had their way with him in adolescence for he never outgrew a passion to play detective. The best setting for this rôle came in October, 1882, when he descended upon the establishment of Kelly and Bliss—a place which had been accorded full police protection. It was even said—and certainly believed by Comstock—that the district attorney was on friendly terms with the fraternity. Accordingly Anthony recruited his force of raiders from New York. Leading a band of twenty men, he set out to achieve a surprise attack. They went in carriages like mourners on their way to a funeral. Later the story was set in circulation that Comstock had hired a dummy hearse to deceive the watchers at the doors of the gambling places. In his own account of the raid, however, he mentions no such device. Possibly he thought of it later, for when he told the story to friends in his declining years the hearse became part of the yarn.

We took four carriages [writes Anthony in *Traps for the Young*], and the driver of the carriage in which I rode took the lead; "he knew the way," he said.

Instead of going to the Court-House, he drove out about one and a half miles out of our way, up to a cemetery. This delayed us over an hour. But it was providential. There had been, as we afterward learned, a large crowd of gamblers in court that morning, on the alert to see if anything was to be done against them.

After some protest, the sheriff signed the commissions for Comstock's men and the funeral procession was off to track down the quarry. Even in the telling Anthony has succeeded in recapturing a little of the rapture which was his upon that afternoon. Circumstances were happily combined to give him pleasure. He was doing the work of the Lord and thoroughly enjoying himself as well. One does not need to be a Puritan to delight in such a synthesis.

As our carriage slowed up in front of Lovell's place, the one assigned to me [says Comstock in his book], the four men with me and myself sprang out and made a dash through two liquor saloons to gain the entrance door to this place. We were seen by the lookout and he ran to give the alarm and close the door. We reached the door just as the gamblers within started to get out. There were about seventy-five men and youth present. We stopped their exit. Then they rushed for a back door. I started across the room, to prevent their escape, when my eye caught the flash of two or three revolvers. I quickly drew mine, and with my warrants in one hand, revolver in the other, and my shield on my left breast, I announced my authority and commanded their peaceful surrender. At the same time I ordered those endeavoring to escape to halt and preserve order.

The others made a dash for the back windows, only to be checked in the same manner. We then arraigned the crowd in the centre of the large hall, and selected our prisoners. Then I turned the balance into the streets.

This hall was about fifty by seventy-five feet, and lined on all sides with paraphernalia for registering bets and wagers and for gambling. We seized everything, leaving but bare floors and bare walls.

The day had begun well, but the chase was not yet over. The sheriff, who seems to have participated in the business without enthusiasm, turned up to report that the place assigned to him was already closed. But he was a liar as well

as a spoil-sport, and Comstock's eagerness for justice and adventure led him to take the assignment for his own.

Upon entering this place, I saw through a small window, high up in the rear of the room and overlooking an extension roof, a pair of legs, and between them and myself I saw a "roulette" wheel. Taking two men, we started up the stairs to find three doors barring our admission.

It was but the work of a moment to break down these doors, and then get out of the back window, run across the roofs of two houses and into a hotel, where I found two gamblers, the roulette-wheel, and about 20,000 pool-tickets which they were bearing away.

And even yet there was more of the Lord's work to do. In front of the door of still another establishment marched a local city official, a coroner, who also owned the saloon through which entrance was to be had to the gambling rooms. The coroner took up his stand at a closed door and ordered Comstock not to enter. Once more the shield on Anthony's left breast shone in the light as he flipped back his coat. And still the coroner remained defiant.

Without further ado [continues Comstock], having complied with all the requirements of the law, I put my best foot forward and made, with the second advance of my foot, a hole large enough for my body to go through. [Apparently, Comstock means to say he kicked a hole in the door. He was not so portly then as later.] I jumped through, to be caught in the "loving" (?) arms of the coroner. It was but an instant before he discovered he had something other than a dead body in charge, and suddenly moved off with a sort of centrifugal motion, toward the east fence of his beer-garden. In other words, flinging him off, I made for the other door, and the same foot starting forward suddenly, the door went in, the locks giving way, and our little band of four had charge of a room containing, as it was estimated at the time by those present, about \$15,000 worth of gambling materials.

Nor was this the end of one of the happiest days in Comstock's life. There was still life in the coroner.

We at once set to work inventorying the matter. While thus engaged, the coroner rumseller, with one of his sneaks, emboldened by the crowd of about 150 roughs that had flocked into his gin-mill and beer-garden, came into the saloon, and caught hold of me, demanding in a loud and commanding tone my name.

I replied, "Peace officer, and you will be obliged to get out of here."

To be sure, this was not the softest possible answer, and the coroner refused to accept it.

He said [continues Comstock's account of the altercation], "I won't do it. I want your name."

It was a critical moment. The throng outside were his sympathizers. They only wanted a leader to formulate themselves into an ugly mob to handle.

It was not a time to parley or show the white feather. Decisive action, a bold front, and a faithful discharge of duty required that no interference be tolerated. It looked a little as though the coroner was looking after a job.

Accordingly I took him by the shoulder and put him out of the building and barred the door.

The attack had been successful but not yet was the position consolidated and the counter-attack was still to come.

The crowd hung around for awhile, and then all of a sudden began to rush out again, amid considerable commotion.

There was evidently something brewing. . . . There was a babel of voices on the street as the crowd surged from Borden Avenue up Front Street. As I came forward there were cries of "Bring him out!" "Shoot him!" "Hang the — —!" etc., as my assistants afterward informed me.

The commotion at the door increased, and with difficulty my men restrained the mob from entering. I hastened to

their assistance, and as I did so I saw two men force them aside and enter. As I approached I discovered "mine host," the coroner. The deadly pallor of his face reminded me of his subjects. It may have been the shadow from some of the ghastly forms he has had to "sit upon." He belched out like a mad bull. "I want you to arrest that man," said he to his companion. Then turning to me he said, "This is a sergeant of police."

The sergeant was about six feet two inches in height. They approached me. I hastened to greet them, not as long-lost brothers, but by taking them each by the arm, saying, "I am a peace officer of this county, and am in charge of this place with a search-warrant, and you will have to get out of here," and then I ejected them.

This was done calmly, but in a manner that comes from a consciousness of necessity and of duty. It was just that determination and promptness that was required to effectually check the mob.

It is not unjust, we think, to harp on the fact that Anthony Comstock, in the days of his youth and strength, delighted in physical encounter. Assuming that he was in many ways a repressed individual, an afternoon such as that which he spent smashing down doors in Long Island City must have been excellent for both his ego and his circulation. There were in his own mind locked compartments with which he did not dare to tamper. But almost it seemed to him that he was free and clear from every inhibition when he could swing his foot and hear the wood of alien doors give way. Primitive peoples have hit upon a not dissimilar trick, and burn their enemies in effigy. Comstock, angry all over at things in himself which he feared and hated, could hold up his head and swing his shoulders with new zest after ejecting a coroner and a police sergeant six feet two inches in height. One has a right to doubt if everything was done as calmly as Comstock says. Possibly he maintained an outer show of dignified demeanor. Even that was not precisely

characteristic of him. And in his heart all the while, we may imagine, he heard the call of trumpets and flashed his shield of office as if it were a knightly device and himself a sorely pressed crusader carving out victory with a battle-ax.

As I look back over that day [wrote Anthony in summing up the afternoon's adventure], and consider the mob that were present, sustained, cheered, and encouraged by sympathizing officials, I can but bow my head to the One who surely on that day "led me on" and screened us from danger and harm. To His great Name be all the glory. We succeeded because we trusted in Him.

This seems a most estranging pious humility. We venture to doubt whether God was much in the mind of Comstock when he seized the coroner and threw him up against the wall of the beer-garden. And certainly it is fair to assume that it was Anthony's idea and not a direct command from Heaven which moved him to kick down the door.

Comstock never got quite as much enjoyment out of action against gamblers as he did in the pursuit of purveyors of obscene books and pictures. Decidedly the gambling was an afterthought. The Society for the Suppression of Vice lived from hand to mouth upon the voluntary contributions of its supporters. We have seen that it had grown increasingly difficult for Comstock to make a showing in arresting the pornography dealers. He had impaired his livelihood by his own efficiency. Other fields had to be explored if the Society was to be continued as a going concern. There need not be any doubt that Anthony honestly detested all gaming. This was a part of his tradition and his training. But something is lacking in the trumpet notes when he rides out to hunt the policy-seller. The merry bugle calls he sounded in pursuit of smut have grown a little dimmer. If Anthony had lived on into the Freudian era and had informed him-

self about the theories, he might have taken some satisfaction in learning that to the analysts gambling is often a sex substitute. But as things were, it fell far below sex as a subject to arouse his interest and hate. He never made denial that he himself had felt the tug of devilish temptation toward fleshly lusts, but there is no record that gambling was ever among the sins which came into his mind. Chasing lottery men was a chore. No soul-purging through self-scourging came to Comstock in this phase of his activities. In this very fact may lie the explanation for his wisdom and even fair-mindedness in dealing with such cases. He was guilty of no ridiculous excesses in the handling of the gambling campaign. When race-track betting was legalized in New York State, Comstock was reluctant to proceed against the pool-rooms where bets were made upon the horses. "It doesn't seem fair to me," he said to an associate, "to let a man bet at the track and to arrest another for doing the same thing in some place outside the race course. The law says in effect that if a man straddles the fence around a race track he may reach across it with his right hand and give his money to a book-maker. That's legal. If he reaches outside with his left hand and makes the bet with a pool-room keeper that's illegal. I don't want to have anything more to do with it."

This very honesty, this beguiling reasonableness lend a touch of pathos to the essential failure of Comstock's crusade against gambling. In the abolishment of the great lotteries he played, to be sure, no inconspicuous part. But his raids on the gamblers of New York State, whom for more than twenty years he zealously pursued, are scarcely associated with his memory. The end which he sought was accomplished—the State laws against gambling were eventually strengthened and enforced. Yet, when the campaign for this reform was waged, the indefatigable Comstock was not

in the van. He was left aside, like some unhonored straggler who had not spent himself in the fight.

Against gambling, the Empire State was provided with laws in plenty. The failure to enforce them, especially in New York City, was part of the black political iniquity of the period. Gambling houses, like the saloons and the wide-open red-light district, were at that time sources of revenue to the incubus of the great city—Tammany Hall.

The Tweed Ring exposures had caused a world-wide scandal in 1871. People were convinced that the Wigwam's power was broken. But "Honest John" Kelly, who succeeded Tweed as boss of New York—maintaining that position from 1874 until his death in 1886—soon rebuilt the organization. Much talk of reform attended Kelly's rule, and, compared with the gigantic depredations of the Tweed régime, the stealing in Kelly's time was actually moderate. But under the surface the old leaven was working. When Richard Croker succeeded Kelly in 1886, the city administration was once more a flaunting scandal. Loud and constant were the accusations of blackmail, of extortion, of crooked voting, of immunity given to crime—all the sordid, shabby concomitants of official corruption. Almost every year reform movements were started. For the most part, these were partisan and insincere. None gave rise to permanent results. The public conscience seemed atrophied.

Such, then, was the social and political situation which inevitably gave color to any reforming activities of the time. With these forces, Anthony Comstock must have been well acquainted. Repeatedly, in his gambling raids, he saw that the police were negligent. Often they were actually abetting the law-breakers. Yet he does not seem to have taken into account the powerful ramifications of the system. With magnificent confidence and enthusiasm, he tirelessly operated against the policy-shops and the pool-rooms—only to have

them reopen as fast as he could close them. Here, indeed, was a use for that favorite metaphor of his, so often applied to the traffic in obscenity—"the hydra-headed monster." It was clear that his cases, drowned in judicial forgetfulness, were being postponed from month to month—even from year to year. But still he continued to fight with undiminished optimism, gathering fresh evidence, making new arrests, volubly protesting to the current Governor of the State, composing tracts that bristle and squawk with outraged honesty.

At length, in 1894, with the appointment of the Lexow Committee by the State Senate, a searching examination of the morals of the metropolis was in order. John W. Goff, the committee's counsel, exposed Tammany methods with a vigorous scorn which New York had not known since 1873. Now once more, in headlines, cartoons, editorials, the press fulminated against civic misgovernment. The corruption of the police, the prevalence of illegal gambling received a goodly share of condemnation. Anthony Comstock, we might suppose, had come into his own. Here, in a suddenly awakened public conscience, was the reward merited by a diligent pioneer. But in the Lexow Committee's investigation Comstock is asked to play no part at all. Ironically, and with complete injustice, he figured before the committee only in the testimony of one Streep—a green-goods swindler whose arrest he had formerly caused—as having accepted a bribe of a thousand dollars.

The fact was that, in the field of gambling reform, Comstock's thunder had been stolen. In 1878, still another reform society had been organized in New York. Its efforts were especially directed against the evils of saloons, gambling and houses of prostitution. It called itself "The Society for the Prevention of Crime"—a name which few people have ever succeeded in distinguishing from that of the

society with which Comstock was connected.¹ Under the leadership of its president, the Rev. Dr. Howard Crosby, it seems to have been a nice, namby-pamby organization which attracted no great attention. But a change took place when, in 1891, the presidency passed to the Rev. Dr. Charles Henry Parkhurst, pastor of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church. Before that time, the Society for the Prevention of Crime had been known as "Dr. Crosby's society." It became "Dr. Parkhurst's society" without delay.

Dr. Parkhurst was, like Mr. Comstock, an intrepid fighter for the betterment of society. He was also a strong-willed and obstinate man, with a keen sense of the dramatic, and a preference for dominating any enterprise with which he was associated. He had certain obvious advantages over the vice-hunter—advantages of superior education, of the dignity and prestige of his cloth, of the possession of a pulpit and a following. He had, moreover, no taste for small game. The closing of a pool-room or a house of prostitution—the reformer's routine of petty prosecutions—interested him only as an incident. He was bent on exposing, not evil-doers, but the police who permitted the evil-doers to flourish. In the first sermon which he preached against official corruption, on February 14, 1892, he spared no words. The city officials he characterized as "a lying, perjured, rum-soaked and libidinous lot." For the most part, the newspapers were against him, and from the Wigwam rumbled threats of libel. Dr. Parkhurst was called before the Grand Jury, and asked to prove his charges. This, of his own knowledge, he was unable to do.

From this experience he learned a lesson. In company

¹The reason for this ambiguous selection is not known. It has resulted in several disputes over legacies between the two societies, notably a bequest of \$200,000 which was given to the Society for the Prevention of Crime, though warmly, and with some reason, claimed by the older society.

S. O. FOX, ESQ., SETS A LOTTERY TRAP.



LIEUT. D. P. DONKEY LEADS THE CROWD INTO IT.

The cartoon shown above is taken from "The Columbian" of December 13, 1880. Widespread opposition to the great lotteries existed for years before a law was passed preventing their operation.



Early in 1901 ruefully humorous protests against civic reform activities were frequent in the metropolitan press. Cartoon from the Brooklyn "Eagle," January 31, 1901.

REFORMERS CARRIENATIONIZE THE EAST



The Committee of Fifteen's crusade against gambling received wide publicity in which Comstock had no part. Cartoon from the New York "Evening World" of February 27, 1901.

with a detective and a member of his congregation (the latter was later subjected to such mortifying cross-examination that he fainted on the witness stand) he spent three weeks in making the rounds of the vilest dives he could find. On March 13, one month after his former sermon, he delivered another attack on civic misgovernment—this time, with 284 affidavits on his pulpit. The connection of the police with houses of prostitution had been unmistakably and publicly established. In the commotion which followed, the Chamber of Commerce asked for a senatorial investigation of the Police Department. The Lexow Committee was the result.

The annual reports of the Society for the Suppression of Vice had declared that through the efforts of its agents 600 gambling saloons, formerly operating wide open, had been forced to close or function in secret. But in his February, 1892, sermon Dr. Parkhurst said, "Gambling houses flourish on all these streets almost as thick as roses in Sharon," and the findings of the Lexow Committee two years later amply bore him out. Anthony's error in his crusade against the gamblers seems to have been a matter of unsophistication—certainly not of enthusiasm, courage or assiduousness. We do not know whether he felt jealous of Dr. Parkhurst's rival activities, or of the publicity—not all, of course, favorable, for the preacher was bitterly attacked—which they received. His recorded emotions about the Lexow Committee are confined to distress and indignation over that unkind cut, the lying accusation of bribery made by the green-goods swindler, Streep. There was no shadow of truth in the charge—Streep presently served a term in the penitentiary for libel—but the widely heralded slander was in many quarters believed. Contributions to the Society for the Suppression of Vice were cut down as a result.

Dr. Parkhurst had boasted that Tammany Hall had been destroyed in 1894, but by 1899 the private affairs of New

York City were again under scrutiny—this time on the part of a committee appointed by the State Assembly. Little resulted from this investigation. But in November of 1900, Bishop Henry C. Potter preached a sermon on police corruption in the red-light district. Its effect was electric. A reform group, the Committee of Fifteen, was organized, and once more the newspapers burned with righteous indignation, once more cartoons of venal policemen were everywhere. The metropolis flinched under an avalanche of blows from every quarter. The rumor that Carrie Nation was coming to New York to add her quota of abuse, aroused sardonic amusement.

Gambling scandals formed an important part of the news. But still Anthony Comstock played no part. This reformer, pre-eminent in his fight against pornography, had shrunk back into a nobody in the fight against civic corruption—he was merely the over-zealous little man who used to be a drygoods salesman, outclassed in his honest, ineffectual tilt against a grandiose system of roguery. Gradually he abandoned the fight into which he had thrown his energies and the resources of his society. Seizures of gambling slot-machines, attacks on race-track gambling and the laws which sanctioned it—these are the only evidences of his former preoccupation with this field of reform. Occasionally, he found some tonic excitement at the race tracks—in 1902, he obtained thirty-four arrests for gambling at Saratoga, New York, though it had been reported that his life would be taken by cowboys brought from the West, if he dared to show his face in the town.

His record in the anti-gambling crusade was an honorable one. Among the chores carried on by Comstock were many others which should be presented in the record although his activities in these directions have been largely forgotten. As Post Office inspector it was his duty to proceed against fake

promoters of all sorts. In *Frauds Exposed*, he devotes chapters to "Bogus Bankers and Brokers," "Bogus Mining Companies," "Watch and Jewelry Swindlers" and "Sundry Frauds." It was his job to follow up the spurious begging letter and to root out shyster schemes for making money. In all these things he was an efficient public servant. Only when sex flew in at the window did Anthony Comstock fly off the handle.

H. B.

CHAPTER XIV

BOUQUETS AND BRICKBATS

THOSE familiar with the family life of the Comstocks in their middle and later years remembered one phrase which was often on Anthony's lips. It was, "Now, my dear woman, just leave everything to me."

We may be sure that she did. Life with the self-effacing Maggie must have been all that Comstock could have desired. As the years passed, the gentle weary woman whom he had married seems to have faded out, like an old photograph. Always timidly lacking in self-assertion, through years of domestic tyranny she shrank into the wraith-like little person in black, of whom people found it hard to recall a distinguishing characteristic.

At home the stout, bald man with the gamboge whiskers reigned supreme in a community of four women—Maggie, her invalid sister, Jennie Hamilton, the defective adopted child, Adele, and the maid-of-all-work. He had bought himself a house in Summit, New Jersey—a comfortable frame house, with porches, bay windows and cupolas—and within the limits of this small domain his word was law. His finger was in every household pie. Especially when money was to be dispensed was his authority in evidence, and one friend of the family remarked that he purchased even the sheets and pillow-cases. To Maggie he doled out small necessary sums; but his was the hand that kept the neat, meticulous accounts of their expenses. When he was dead, some one had to show the widow how to make out a

check—she had never controlled enough money to warrant her learning this simple operation.

As if in compensation for such sweet domestic dominance, Comstock frequently ran into trouble when he attempted to interfere with the affairs of women outside the home circle. Mrs. Woodhull and Miss Claflin, though admittedly a disgraceful pair, had brought him not a little ridicule. Restell had known that bloody ending in the bath-tub, but in many minds the memory of the miserable old woman survived to bear ghostly testimony against the man who had caused her arrest. Early in the new century, another unfortunate woman, Ida C. Craddock, heaped obloquy on Comstock's graying head.

She was a sufficiently pitiful figure, this Miss Craddock of Philadelphia. Born of Quaker stock, she had for many years been a teacher of shorthand. When she came to Comstock's notice in 1902, she was forty-five years old. She had left shorthand and Philadelphia behind her. The sign on the door of her room in West Twenty-third Street, New York, bore the legend, "Instructor in Divine Science."

Miss Craddock had for some years been subject to erotic hallucinations, to which she gave a religious interpretation. She believed herself the earthly wife of an angel, and on the basis of her marital experiences with him, wrote a number of essays, including a defense, from a folklore standpoint, of the *danse du ventre*. Physicians had declared her insane; but within the limits of her delusion her mind functioned rationally, even brilliantly.

Among the unfortunate woman's writings was a pamphlet, *The Wedding Night*, which contained advice for the newly married. She asserted that this work had been reviewed by medical magazines of standing; and no less a person than the Rev. Dr. W. S. Rainsford, rector of St. George's Church, New York, had written her that, if all young people were

to read her pamphlet, "much misery, sorrow and disappointment could be avoided." Comstock, however, denounced the pamphlet as "the science of seduction." When his agent had secured evidence against her, Miss Craddock was arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced in the State courts. After completing a term of three months in jail, she was rearrested on the charge of sending improper matter through the mails. The judge of the United States Circuit Court, before whom she was tried, pronounced *The Wedding Night* "indescribably obscene." The jury, who were given no opportunity of examining the pamphlet, found her guilty without leaving their seats.

But before she was to appear for sentence, Ida Craddock, asserting that, like Socrates, she claimed the right to die as she chose, had inhaled gas in her room on the fourth floor of the Twenty-third Street house. The certainty of another prison sentence she could not face. "I am taking my life," she wrote in one of her farewell letters, "because a judge, at the instigation of Anthony Comstock, has declared me guilty of a crime which I did not commit—the circulation of obscene literature."

It is not recorded that Comstock ever listed Miss Craddock's death among his achievements in the cause of purity. Restell, we remember, was the fifteenth whom he drove to self-destruction. The serial number of the shorthand teacher we do not know. Comstock had left off bragging about suicides. Possibly he had come to realize that in most people such boasts had awakened something very like horror. In any event, the Craddock case needed no advertisement. The condemned woman's last letters, in which she stated that Comstock had persecuted her and made false statements about her, had taken care of that.

The crusader was fifty-eight years old at the time of

Miss Craddock's death. For nearly thirty years he had been an active public figure. He had, among persons of his own persuasion, a host of warm admirers. If the story of his life seems largely to consist of attacks on his good repute, the explanation lies partly in the fact that these attacks furnish interesting material. Conflict, which was the breath of Mr. Comstock's nostrils, has a dramatic quality. Kind words make vapid reading. Yet we must not forget that bouquets as well as brickbats were tossed at the vice-hunter. In the nineties he reaped quite a harvest of encomiums. The twentieth anniversary of his work was fittingly celebrated at Carnegie Hall in 1892. And the *Mail & Express*, in recognition of the "china wedding" of his connection with the cause of purity, sponsored the purchase of an elaborate dinner service of hand-painted china—the gift of scores of Mr. Comstock's admirers throughout the country. Sketches of a turkey platter, a soup tureen and a gravy boat adorned the story which the *Mail & Express* carried on the day following the presentation. "It was a testimonial," declared that newspaper, "of admiration for his splendid career and of respect for the intrepidity, sincerity and self-sacrifice of the man who twenty years ago set out almost single-handed to fight the battle for purity and cleanly lives."

In 1897, the twenty-fifth anniversary of Mr. Comstock's personal crusade was made the occasion of yet another celebration at Carnegie Hall. Crowds filled the edifice. Anthony's heart must have swelled with pride, as he listened to the fine things which Morris K. Jesup and others had to say about his devotion, his heroism, his accomplishments. He himself was given an opportunity to tell the story of his quarter century of work for the youth of America. And when the cheering and the prayers of thanksgiving had died away, Mr. Jesup and some other friends had a gift for him

—a check for \$5,000—in recognition of his long years of faithful service.

So there were moments, as Anthony Comstock rounded out the firm curve of his mature years, when he must have felt that he had succeeded in his purpose. In some measure he had seen his dream fulfilled—the dream of an ambitious Puritan, if ever there was one. He was recognized as the champion of purity, as the strong arm raised against pictured and written indecencies. Good folk were on his side, the Christian laymen, many of the clergy, mothers and fathers, school-teachers—all right-thinking people, in fact. If loud voices were raised against him, if the National Defense Association proved annoying, there were many to remind him that a man might be judged by his enemies. Smut-dealers, ex-criminals, the gambling fraternity—he could describe and denounce them all.

If the man could have walked with circumspection, much might still have been forgiven him by the public whose servant he was. But moderation was unthinkable in this crusader. Caution and coolness are not among the properties of fanaticism. It is, of course, scarcely reasonable to suppose that Comstock could have anticipated Miss Craddock's suicide and the consequent publicity derogatory to himself. But his pursuit of the deranged lady had had an odor of persecution, and with its unhappy termination seemed colored by a feral and relentless quality. Memories of all that had been implacable in Comstock's words and conduct came flooding back. Miss Craddock's friends were not slow to utilize them. The liberals and the freethinkers were hot after the vice-hunter, with a fresh battle-cry.

Anthony Comstock had always been sensitive to criticism, and this time the shafts were especially painful. Not only among the unregenerate did the Craddock affair arouse antagonism. Contributions to the Society for the Suppression

of Vice fell off in a startling manner. The good people were for the cause of purity. But they were also for moderation, for discretion. The Society was forced to abandon a plan for raising a large endowment fund, bearing the name of the lately martyred President of the United States. "I would not like to be in your shoes," wrote the Rev. Dr. Rainsford in a letter which cut Anthony to the quick. "You hounded an honest, not a bad woman to her death. I would not like to have to answer to God for what you have done."

Was Comstock's confidence shaken? Not, apparently, for a moment. "Cruel, uncivil, insulting and unjustifiable"—this was his description of the eminent clergyman's brief and trenchant communication. But he was terribly disturbed by Dr. Rainsford's attack, desperately anxious to set himself right by explaining the facts. He fruitlessly invited the rector of St. George's to present his accusations at a meeting of the Society's Executive Committee. Comstock called three times at the rectory—where he was not received. In a long, pleading letter, he entreated Dr. Rainsford to come to his office and cross-question him, bringing with him "the shrewdest lawyer" he could secure.

You, sir, may be a seed-sower in the Garden of the Lord [wrote Anthony]. I may occupy the position of a weeder. You may stand in the most favored position before the World, and you may look down upon the weeder in his obscure corner. But, if I am assigned to that particular corner by the Great Master who is over us all, then I have no concern except that my corner is well tilled, and that there are no thistles or briars allowed to grow to wound and destroy childhood and youth as they pass by my beat.

Some suspicion may be cast on Comstock's humility by the abrupt and doubtless unconscious change in metaphor at the end of this paragraph. While he may have honestly pictured himself as an obscure weeder in God's garden, he

could not escape the deeper conviction that he was an important and aggressive member of God's patrol. But, weeder or constable, his belief in his good judgment was complete and unassailable. As the years brought him experience, this confidence in his own competence was hardened and confirmed. Usually the court decisions were on his side—he grew more and more expert in preparing his cases—and to Comstock soon after God came the Law.

Nevertheless, he was to lose one important case,—a case occasioning a storm of publicity which shook and nearly shattered the fabric of his life-work. Again, in 1906, Comstock was so imprudent as to arrest a woman. A cry of persecution again went up, and there was foolish talk about dragging off an unoffending girl to prison. But the events were, this time, not tragic; rather they were cast in a vein of comedy.

In the summer of 1906, the eye of the crusader fell upon a pamphlet issued by the Art Students' League, and found it very objectionable indeed. The studies of nudes which it contained he considered unfit for general distribution. These pamphlets, according to the official biographer, Trumbull, were being sent "apparently to people of all sorts, whether known to be lovers of art or not." Investigation revealed that "girls and unmarried women" were on the mailing list.

The agents of the Society made an honest effort to find a man connected with this case. The pitfalls connected with arresting women they recognized. But both the mailing department at the League's offices on West Fifty-seventh Street and the desk where catalogues were given away were in charge of women. At length, with some trepidation the risky step was taken. The young bookkeeper of the League was taken into custody. "No one was more regretful or sought more earnestly to relieve this young woman of any

embarrassment in the matter than did the Agent of this Society," asserted the Annual Report for the year 1906. To her counsel it was suggested that she might be spared the disgrace of appearing under her own name; and the newspapers carried the announcement that a Miss Robinson had been arrested. It was also suggested that a plea of guilty might be entered in court without the young woman appearing, and that the Society would consent to a suspended sentence. The catalogues would then be legally condemned, and could be destroyed.

The so-called Miss Robinson, however, duly appeared in court, where she was reported as being in a highly nervous condition. Indeed so hysterical did she become that a doctor was subsequently called. She was, it appeared, only nineteen years old. Next morning, when Mr. Comstock arrived at his office, he greeted the waiting reporters with angry frowns. Here he was, once more embroiled in persecuting a woman! The rôle of ogre to a frail and innocent girl did not please him. "I'd like to know who gave that out to the papers," the *World* reported that he said. "I thought it was going to be kept quiet."

Quiet, however, was the last thing that Anthony might expect from this unfortunate affair. Dubious as the Society must have been about the popularity of their course, the League felt that it had nothing to lose by publicity. Officers and students alike were ill-disposed to endure this assault in silence. For years they had been circulating pamphlets similar to those which Comstock had seized; and they asserted that they were sent through the mails with the knowledge and consent of the postal authorities. Alarmists were disposed to view the raid as the beginning of a concerted attack on art schools. An emergency meeting of the officers of the League was called. Mr. Comstock's society was threatened with the revoking of its charter;

and Mr. Comstock himself with the loss of his commission as Post Office inspector. An interview with Gutzon Borglum appeared in the *New York World* of August 3, 1906. "My God, what are we coming to?" was one of his comments, and another was the inevitable "Comstock is the one who is lewd." With withering scorn, he inquired why the crusader, instead of interfering with art, did not confiscate Boccaccio, the Heptameron, Rabelais and Balzac. The sculptor's irony, however, failed of its purpose. Mr. Comstock had already attended to literature.

The art students avenged themselves with malicious caricatures of a pious old gentleman with sideburns, wings and a halo. A fat effigy of Comstock was hung outside a third-story window of the League, bearing a placard with the current witticism, "23 for Comstock." The *World* of August 4, 1906, carried on its front page a full-length photograph of the "vice chaser," flanked by equally large photographs of the Venus de Milo and the Apollo Belvedere—with the suggestion that he would arrest them if they appeared outdoors. Not only in terms of art were the attacks on Comstock expressed. An organization of artists and sculptors suggested that he should be boiled in oil. And one of the art students composed a sonnet, dedicated to the crusader, which contained a scathing reference to "sexless clowns who shun love's hallowed fire."

If Anthony had embarked on this enterprise with trepidation, he was by the time that the hearing was held clearly eager to be done with it. In the courtroom he called for the employer of the young bookkeeper to come forward and take her place at the bar. "I want to get at the sneaking hounds behind this woman's skirts," the *Sun* of October 30 quoted him as saying. 'There was laughter in court. There was more laughter at the newspaper's ridicule of the case. Yet, in spite of everything, the prosecution did not

relent until the offending pamphlets had been destroyed. This end accomplished, Comstock quickly extricated himself from his position as a prosecutor of innocent womanhood. He asked that further proceedings against Miss Robinson be dismissed.

Reverberations of this case were long in dying. Naturally, much of the criticism sprang, not from the fact that he had arrested a woman, but from resentment at his having arrested any one at all. Miss Robinson's connection with the case served to heighten the general indignation, and make Comstock's action appear more tyrannical and absurd. The following spring, at a burlesque exhibition held at the League, a student dressed to represent the vice-hunter stamped about the gallery, affecting to regard the pictures with shame and horror. A statuette caricaturing Comstock had been presented to Miss Robinson. In this presentation, Anthony is shown clasping a sculptor's mallet with which he has apparently shattered the Venus de Milo, on which one foot—a cloven one—is resting. Underneath runs the legend, "Do you love this old man?" But though the statuette caused wide amusement, it is evident that its creator had never seen his subject. The meager ascetic in plaster is no kin to the stout and stalwart vice-hunter, whose legs were like tree-trunks.

Undoubtedly a cause of deeper disquiet to Anthony was the report which arose at the end of the year 1906 that he had lost his Post Office commission. His office as inspector had given his work that national and international character of which he was so proud. In December his dismissal from the Government service was definitely announced by the press. It was, according to the account then given, a victory for the art students, for members of the League had visited Washington to complain that the veteran inspector was abusing his privileges. An investigation had been ordered.

But Comstock was not deprived of the official powers which for over thirty years he had so arrogantly enjoyed. By December 29, he was able to tell the inquisitive newspaper reporters that his commission for 1907 was in his pocket. He was not so ready to confess the truth of the rumor that a salary of \$1,500 accompanied his reappointment. All these years he had served the Post Office without remuneration—that was a boast he had been proud to make. There was, moreover, a hint of reproof in the Postmaster-General's insisting that he receive a salary like other inspectors, instead of remaining the foot-loose agent possessed of powers less strictly regulated than the rest.

Yet the authorities were not without appreciation, and not without gratitude. Anthony had to pocket his salary with as good a grace as he could muster, but he was mightily heartened by the cordial reception which George B. Cortelyou, then Postmaster-General, gave him when, alarmed at the newspaper stories, he hastened to Washington.

There may have been a few cases in which his methods have been open to some criticism [wrote the Postmaster-General to the Chief Inspector in a letter expressing appreciation of Inspector Comstock's long and faithful service], but any man who wages war upon impurity and obscenity cannot hope to avoid criticism.

He has stood as a barrier between the youth of the land and a frightfully demoralizing traffic, and I want him to know that, looking at his work in its larger aspect, he has had and will continue to have the hearty support of this Department.

That letter was the vindication of his late unhappy affair with the art students, and, temporarily at least, it silenced those odious rumors that he had been ignominiously dismissed from the Government service. It must have wiped from Comstock's mind the bitterness of those days when the newspapers carried front-page stories of his persecution

of a nineteen-year-old girl, or photographs of himself flanked by scantily draped works of art.

The loss of his Post Office appointment might have broken the old man completely. He could scarcely have borne the dishonor. But even governments sometimes have hearts. Though Comstock's value to the department which he had loyally served must have been decreasing yearly, he wore the badge of his office until his death.

In 1913, he was quite brisk and hearty about the whole affair, when he related it to his biographer, Trumbull. He reverted to that metaphor which he had used in his letter to Dr. Rainsford. "You fellows who are sowing seed," he said, "don't know what the rays of the sun are on the back of the weeder."

M. L.

CHAPTER XV

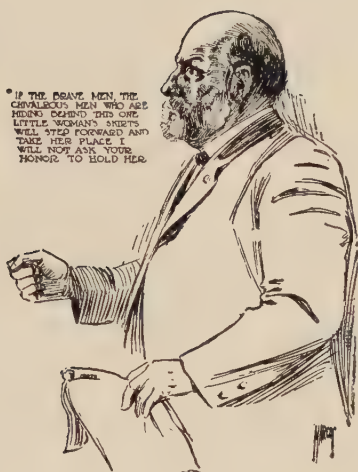
ARTISTIC AND CLASSICAL TRAPS

AFTER a time *Only A Boy* was hardly to be found outside the libraries of diligent collectors. Gone, too, was *A Night in a Moorish Harem*. It was then that Mr. Comstock discovered the classics. Probably to his surprise and certainly to his horror, he learned that pornography was an ancient evil. His bitterness was not lessened because certain scenes and images which he had pursued in paper covers were to be had more subtly written and more richly bound. Neither language nor leather could turn Anthony from his chase. Indeed it sometimes appears that his indignation over what he called "classical traps" was even greater than that which he bestowed on their more shabby brothers.

It is fair to say that not every *Decameron* or *Droll Stories* put upon the market represented an honest attempt upon the part of the dealer to satisfy a craving for good literature. Sometimes the publishers even went to the length of editing Balzac or Boccaccio. Not to expurgate the more ribald passages, you understand, but to cut away such portions of the books as offered nothing to seekers after the erotic.

Seemingly, Comstock realized that public opinion would oppose the suppression of books long known as classics. Upon no other campaign did he ever argue at such length to justify himself. He became, for the purposes of his work, a critic, and undertook the difficult task of giving the world still another definition of the function of art. And

"IF THE DEAVE MEN, THE
CHIVALROUS MEN WHO ARE
HUNGRY DEMAND THIS ONE
LITTLE WOMAN'S MISTS
WILL STEP FORWARD AND
TAKE HER PLACE. I
WILL NOT ASK YOUR
HONOR TO HOLD HER.



ANTHONY COMSTOCK

(Above) A cartoon by Marcus in the New York "Herald" of October 31, 1906, shows the irate Comstock in the courtroom during the trial of the bookkeeper of the Art Students' League. In this drawing the scar on the vice-hunter's cheek is clearly indicated. (Left) A puny figure with a saintly expression and a cloven hoof was one art student's conception of the reformer.



These three drawings are taken from the New York "Recorder" of August 7, 1893.



The shameless "hip-dancers" of the Midway Plaisance at the Chicago World's Fair drew tirades of horror and disgust from Comstock. To reporters he expressed his conviction that it would be better to close the Fair than to permit young men from all parts of the country to cultivate a taste for such depravity.

while the mood was on he included painters as well as publishers.

Strychnine [began Comstock in characteristic fashion] is a deadly poison. Its effect when administered sugar-coated is the same as when administered otherwise. When the genius of art reproduces obscene, lewd and lascivious ideas, the deadly effect upon the morals of the young is just as perceptible as when the same ideas are represented by gross expressions in prose or poetry. . . .

Art is not above morals. *Morals stand first.* Law ranks next as the defender of public morals. Art only comes in conflict with law when its tendency is obscene, lewd or indecent.

He elaborated his idea still further:

The closer art keeps to pure morality the higher is its grade. Artistic beauty and immorality are divergent lines. To appeal to the animal in man does not inspire the soul of man with ecstasies of the beautiful. Every canvas which bears a mixture of oil and colors upon it is not a work of art. The word "art" is used as an apology for many a daub.

In the first conflict with art Comstock got rather the worst of it. On November 17, 1887, he descended upon the gallery of Herman Knoedler at 170 Fifth Avenue. The house of Knoedler had been in business more than forty years and the proprietors were surprised as well as indignant when Comstock seized 117 photographs of masterpieces of living French artists. Included in the group which he held to be objectionable were reproductions of the work of Bouguereau, Henner and Perrault, and many of these were pictures which had hung in the Paris Salon.

"Fifth Avenue has no more rights in this respect than Centre Street or the Bowery," said Comstock, and he continued with a longer statement in which he wrote:

The morals of the youth of this country are endangered by obscenity and indecency in the shape of photographs of lewd French art—a foreign foe. . . . A mistaken idea also prevails that a painting or an engraving, though exerting an obscene or demoralizing influence, is exempt from the provisions of law because it is called “a work of art.” It is attempted to defend the sale of these French photographs on the plea that they “are works of art” or that “art is in danger.”

In the guise of art this foe to moral purity comes in its most insidious, fascinating and seductive form.

Obscenity may be produced by the pen of the ready writer in prose; it may come upon the flowery wing of poetry; or, as in this instance, by the gilded touch of the brush of the man of genius in art.

It was at this time that an editorial in the *New York World* inquired, “Has it really been determined that there is nothing wholesome in art unless it has clothes on?” Comstock tried hard to answer that question on many occasions. Indeed he made an honest effort to stretch his mind to the uttermost extent of its capacity for liberal thinking. The best he could do was, “The nude in art is not necessarily obscene, lewd or indecent.”

He admitted that the female form was beautiful. Toward the end of his life many of his dissertations began with this statement. But in matters of beauty Comstock was an aristocrat. “Let the nude be kept in its proper place and out of the reach of the rabble,” he said. And to Comstock’s mind the proper place was an art gallery—as long as art galleries continued to be places to which few went. So, if you argued with him far enough, you would find that he did not truly believe in the existence of such a thing as “a pure nude.” It would not be pure to the uncultivated mind.

Here, to be specific, is the development of this phase of the Comstockian philosophy; “The female form is beauti-

ful—a young girl may be nude in her own room and there is no wrong attached to it; but if a lascivious eye looks through the keyhole, then it is wrong for her to be stripped of her clothing.”

Godiva, from Comstock's point of view, was equally guilty with Tom as soon as the peeping began. It was his eye, to be sure, but after all it was her body.

The raid on Knoedler's aroused much public protest. The Society of American Artists passed fiery resolutions condemning Comstock over the signatures of William M. Chase, Augustus St. Gaudens, Kenyon Cox, Alden Weir and many others. The newspapers ragged him hard, but he was not alone in his position and many sympathized with him. It must not be forgotten that the Boston Public Library threw out the Bacchante of MacMonnies.

Comstock was troubled to the point of becoming more articulate than ever before, but he was not dissuaded from his campaign against the arts. A candy-dealer put in the window of his Fulton Street shop a reproduction of Hans Makart's "The Triumph of Charles the Fifth." Charles is represented as riding into Antwerp and the horses are being led by nude boys. Comstock ordered the candy man to take the picture out of the window, and the shopkeeper obeyed him. But the candy man had his revenge. *Life* reproduced a similar picture as that weekly assumed Comstock would like to have it. In this all the horses are in pantaloons.

The greatest outburst of art in America came with the World's Fair at Chicago in 1893. Anthony attended. This time it was the art of dancing which aroused his ire. Much occurred on the Midway which he could in no wise approve. Until the fair, Comstock had never seen or even heard of the existence of such a dance as the hoochie-coochie. Such things might exist in dens of infamy, but now creatures out of

Cairo undulated for the benefit or, if you like, the damnation of the general public. He was not alone in bridling at abominations out of Egypt. Anthony called the matter to the attention of the committee of Chicago women known officially as "The Lady Managers," a group headed by Mrs. Potter Palmer. It was the duty of the Lady Managers to act as hostesses to all the women participating in the fair. The dancers of the Midway complicated the problem most annoyingly. At Comstock's suggestion, three of the Lady Managers visited the various attractions of which he complained, to find if his lurid stories were exaggerated. Anthony was not overruled. The ladies made a formal protest to Director-General Davis and one of them, Mrs. Barker, submitted a report in which she said:

Much against our personal wishes, I visited Midway Plaisance last night, and I must say what I saw has filled my heart with sadness. . . . The utmost depravity and licentiousness were openly practiced. The places were filled with the vilest of women, the equals of those to be found in the lowest parts of Chicago, whose only mission is to degrade and debauch. We are urging our boys and girls to come and see this grand and beautiful exhibition at the risk of contaminating their souls.

Every paper in this city has been calling attention to the iniquities of Midway Plaisance. It is the duty of the Lady Managers to enter their most vigorous protest without delay and demand that these vile places be closed.

I object to the vile, licentious foreign dances. I would sooner lay my two boys in their graves than that they should look at the sights I saw yesterday. Unless we can qualify our invitation so as not to include these women, with whom association will be contaminating, I object to the board putting itself on record as the entertainers of the women of the Midway Plaisance. Appoint me if you will as one of the committee and I will be ready and willing any time to go among and labor with these degraded women, but do not bring them here where no good can result.

After all, though Mrs. Barker did not precisely put it in this way, there are people whom one would gladly lead to Heaven and yet could hardly receive in her own home. Curiously enough, the committee of the Lady Managers was not unanimous in its condemnation of the lascivious foreign dancers of the Midway. One member risked the wrath of God, Anthony Comstock and Mrs. Potter Palmer by reporting, "I thought they were fascinating." The name of the dissenter was Mrs. Shepard.

The depravities of the Midway dancers aroused Comstock to such an extent that he was still fuming when he came back to New York. He was interviewed by a *World* reporter upon his return and, according to the newspaper man, Anthony undertook to show the nature of the dance to which he objected. "The performance was interesting, but not at all libidinous," the young man wrote for the *World* of August 5, 1893. Still, the reporter admitted that Mr. Comstock's performance might have been inadequate. He found him a little too stout and remarked that as Anthony danced "his ginger-colored side-whiskers shivered in the air."

Anthony was conscious of his own shortcomings. "Of course, I can't do it exactly as they did," he apologized, "because I am not as little as they are. It isn't dancing as we understand it. The legs are hardly moved. They bend away back."

At this point, according to the *World* reporter, Mr. Comstock undertook to bend and almost fell on account of the intensity of his effort.

"The whole World's Fair must be razed to the ground or these three shows must stop," he continued. "I'm sure the managers of the World's Fair will gladly purge the performance. The Lady Managers, good and pure women as ever lived, went down there to see that horrible exhibition, so that they might realize how shameful a thing it was.

They stayed clear through the sickening spectacle, utterly overwhelmed with a sense of the degradation of all that is pure and noble in woman.

"They have got to stop it," Mr. Comstock went on. "If they don't I'll have the World's Fair Commissioners indicted for keeping a disorderly house."

According to Comstock, three shows current in the Midway constituted "the most outrageous assault on the sacred dignity of womanhood ever endured in this country."

"You wouldn't dare print an adequate description of that dance in your paper," Anthony told the reporter and read a rough draft of his own report. "He was right," said the reporter in the *World* next day. "It cannot be printed in this newspaper." Not infrequently Comstock expressed his own emotions of shock and horror in language so accurate that his reports might possibly have seemed just a bit obscene if there had ever been another Comstock set upon the task of watching Comstock.

In this same interview he betrayed a sense of civic pride concerning which he was not always articulate. "The very lowest places of public amusement in New York would not tolerate it one day," he said. And he added, "Innocent girls and women go to visit these sideshows and unsuspectingly go in to see the dancing. They are disgusted and shamed by the sight, and besides that they hear the low-minded spectators crying out to the dancers. Decent people have to get up and stalk out before all that crowd. Oh, it's shameful."

But the World's Fair was not razed to the ground, none of the Commissioners was indicted and the Midway dancers continued to dance without moving their legs appreciably more than they did at the time Anthony paid his visit. Comstock had called attention to the iniquity and that was about all that could be expected of him.

Indeed attention-calling came to be more and more the chief function of Anthony Comstock. He was the greatest press agent of his time. Comstock's upraised eyebrow could almost make a man. Bernard Shaw owes him not a little, and so does Bernarr Macfadden. Comstock was kind enough to frown on both these publicists in the days when they were still struggling for fame. Shaw had not yet written either *Saint Joan* or *Androcles and the Lion*, and the *Graphic* was as yet only a bright dream in the mind of Macfadden.

In the case of *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, Comstock did absolutely nothing beyond calling the attention of the police to the play. He attended no performance and never read the play and yet he was directly responsible for the sensation which *Mrs. Warren's Profession* created in New York. Possibly he was horrified by the title and very probably he knew that the Lord Chamberlain had refused a license for its production in London. Comstock heard of Shaw for the first time a few weeks before Arnold Daly announced his intention of putting on the play in New York. Shaw's name was brought to Anthony's notice by accident. The New York Public Library decided in September, 1905, to take *Man and Superman* off the shelves and put it in the reserved section. No explanation was given for this action, but the news was cabled abroad and a reporter from the *New York Times* interviewed Shaw. Mr. Shaw assumed that Comstock had been responsible for the library's action—Shaw had heard of Comstock. But the assumption was erroneous. Anthony had nothing to do with sending *Man and Superman* into seclusion. He did not know that there was such a book. When questioned by the American correspondent, Shaw replied:

"Nobody outside of America is likely to be in the least surprised. Comstockery is the world's standing joke at the

expense of the United States. Europe likes to hear of such things. It confirms the deep-seated conviction of the old world that America is a provincial place, a second rate country town civilization after all."

"Everybody knows," added Shaw, "that I know better than your public library officials what is proper for people to read, whether they are young or old." As an afterthought, Shaw admitted that his work probably could and would do harm "to weak and dishonest people."

After Shaw had spoken in his home across the water, reporters bearing copies of his remarks called on Comstock and found him weeding his garden in Summit, New Jersey.

"George Bernard Shaw? Who is he?" was Comstock's first remark after reading what the Irish playwright had said about him. This may have been sheer pose, but it is entirely possible that Comstock was sincere. Other great figures in the world of art and letters were not known to him. "I never heard of him in my life. Never saw one of his books, so he can't be much," continued Comstock, according to the story printed in the *New York Times* of September 28, 1905. "Did you ever see such egotism," Anthony cried out, as he went over a copy of Shaw's attack upon him. "I had nothing to do with removing this Irish smut-dealer's books from the Public Library shelves, but I will take a hand in the matter now. I see this man Shaw says down here that he knows that his works can probably do harm to weak and dishonest people. Well, that lays him, his works, his publishers, the people who present his plays and all who or which has anything to do with the production or disseminating of them liable to the law which was made primarily to protect the weak. He convicts himself."

And at another point in the interview Comstock said: "The English and the Irish have furnished their full quota

of unfit books and pictures and plays. And if this Irish writer, Shaw, describes himself fairly in his own words, we will bring his works and the people who disseminate them to the test of the law. This Shaw is not outside of our rules.

"You say he has plays also and some of them have been presented and liked in New York City? Well, they will be investigated and the playing people will be dealt with according to the law if it be found that they are such as are indicated by this Shaw himself. We will investigate his books."

The reporter asked Comstock what he thought of Shaw's assertion that "marriage is the most licentious of human institutions."

"I don't know," said Anthony, "and I doubt if he did when he wrote it."

It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that revenge was in the mind of Comstock, as well as public policy, when he undertook to frighten Arnold Daly out of producing *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. The annoying word "comstockery" was invented by Shaw late in September, 1905, and it was on October 24 of the same year that Comstock wrote to Daly as follows:

Dear Sir: I am informed that it is your intention to put upon the stage one of Bernard Shaw's filthy productions entitled "Mrs. Warren's Profession." I also understand that this play has been suppressed in London.

In order that you may not plead ignorance as to the laws and the interpretation of the laws of this State, I beg to call your attention to the following decision made by the Appellate Division in the case of *People vs. Dorris*. . . . [Here Comstock quoted the decision.]

There are many other decisions besides this, but the language is so explicit in this case and as it is the utterance of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of this State, in this district, it seems to be sufficient.

In the annual report of the Society for 1905, Comstock complained that he had sent this note to Arnold Daly in the strictest confidence and that Daly had given it out to the newspapers. Daly was no poor hand at publicity himself and he realized the value of a Comstock condemnation. In giving the reporters Anthony's note, he added his own reply which was:

Dear Sir: You call "Mrs. Warren's Profession" a "filthy play." I cannot believe that you have read it; but, if so, your use of the adjective is decorative, but not descriptive.

It is a strong sermon and a great moral lesson and I cordially invite you to come to the Garrick Theatre on Wednesday or Thursday of next week, when I will be pleased to have you see a rehearsal of it.

This invitation was not accepted, but it seems reasonable to assume that Arnold Daly was aiming over Anthony's head in the general direction of the public. So many came to the first performance that it was necessary to call out the reserves to dispel the crowd. Shaw, Daly and Comstock were all concerned in the ballyhoo and as each was a master in the art of puffery it may be a little unfair to single out one of the three and give him the credit. Still all the evidence points to the conclusion that it was Anthony Comstock who was chiefly responsible for the tumult, though he took no further part in the proceedings. Having started the ball rolling, Anthony could sit back, for Shaw and Daly were capable of keeping it in motion. Shaw gave out an interview in which he said that he had been striving all his life to awaken the public conscience, while Comstock had been examining and destroying ninety-three tons of indecent postcards. And a little later Shaw added in another interview, "Comstock has declared his intention of suppressing me. He had better, for if he does not I am afraid I shall end by shocking him out of his wits."

Arnold Daly helped things along in New York by announcing that children would not be admitted to *Mrs. Warren's Profession*.

Possibly, it is somewhat gratuitous for these biographers to interrupt long enough to express the opinion that the play was and is as sincere as anything Shaw ever wrote. His passion for publicity was also a passion for truth. As the forces were marshalled against him, Bernard Shaw grew somewhat despairing and said, "I cannot fight Comstock with the American nation at his back and the New York police in his van."

To many in America, Comstock was a joke, but he was still a figure of great power. His attitude toward *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was that of his times. At the moment he did not stand as one more readily shocked than those about him. While the editorial writers of New York made a certain amount of fun of Anthony, they generally agreed with the estimate which he made of the play which he had not read. The liberal New York *World* spoke of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* as "tainted drama." The *Sun*, often recklessly daring in its own news columns, said in all seriousness, "All New York will now discuss the hitherto unspeakable. Race suicide is for the moment back-numbered." From which one may gather that in the year 1905 "race suicide" was a phrase considered hardly proper and the farthest north as a theme for emancipated conversation. Eventually *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was held to be not actionable by the Court of Special Sessions. Shaw cabled to the *World*: "It is a strange country where the Press is blind and the eyes of Justice are open. I am profoundly grateful."

But Shaw was grateful for small favors. Justice Olmstead and Justice Wyatt concurred in acquitting Arnold Daly. Justice McAvoy dissented but wrote no opinion.

The play was cleared, then, by the narrow margin of two to one and the majority opinion was severe as to the quality of the comedy. Both justices seemed to suffer from the dramatic critic complex, to which most of the world is subject, and undertook to digress from the law long enough to tell Shaw how a play should be written:

"The theme is not a pleasant one . . . stereotyped railings against current social conditions . . . another of the dramatist's shock producers . . . the dramatist has in this play used old and hackneyed materials, the common tools of scores of other playwrights. . . . In fact there is so little that is attractive that it is safe to predict, without the preliminary sensational advertisement of this proposed production, its life on the boards would be short."

And so in a sense the court decided that Bernard Shaw was a person made important almost wholly because he had chanced to come across the path of Comstock.

Looking back over a period of time no longer than twenty-one years, it is astounding to find that not Comstock, but almost the entire New York community regarded Shaw as a clever and ribald charlatan. Gallery seats for the first night went for ten dollars, and extra chairs were put in the orchestra aisles and sold for fifteen dollars. Outside the Garrick, a multitude was assembled. "Disappointed prurients gathered like peeping Toms," said the *Sun* man. He added, "Such a collection of mugs has seldom gathered on the hither side of Broadway." And it was his impression that "the house inside was divided between the Tenderloin and fashionables."

Parenthetically, much of the irony of the occasion lay in the fact that here was a community outraged and shocked because a playwright dared to discuss prostitution. And in the year 1905, prostitutes ranged openly up and down Broadway only a few steps from the theater. Comstock

was always one more intent upon chasing shadows than actualities.

When the curtain went up [said the lively account in the *Sun*], there was a hush like that which falls on a pool-room at the first whisper of "police." It was fifteen minutes before there was a timid titter. "Laugh" after "laugh" passed in silence. The opening act was all but over before people seemed convinced that nothing would happen to make Mr. McAdoo pull the joint.

It is hard to see by what standard Comstock could list his dealings with *Mrs. Warren's Profession* among his triumphs. Yet he mentioned it at some length in the report which he made that year to the Society for the Suppression of Vice. And in this report he accepts "comstockery" and pins it upon himself as an honor and a decoration.

During the Fall [Comstock wrote], a bold attempt was made to place the reekings of Bernard Shaw upon the public stage in this City. As soon as the announcement was made we sent a letter to Mr. Daly. . . . He chose to give the letter to the Press, and this called especial attention to the character of the exhibition, and engendered considerable discussion. This was an occasion where we sowed, and the Police reaped the harvest. Mr. McAdoo, the Commissioner of Police, visited the performance the first night, and took effectual measures to suppress it. We, therefore, were not obliged to take any action in the matter.

It is very pleasant to report that the authorities of other States in the Union have also taken action against and suppressed this degrading exhibition.

Mr. Shaw, in expressing his contempt for the work of this Society, has coined a new word "Comstockery." We gladly contribute its meaning to this country, to wit:

"Comstockery"—"The applying of the noblest principles of law, as defined by the Higher Courts of Great Britain and the United States of America, in the interest of Public Morals, especially those of the young."

We are pleased to avail ourselves of this opening, made by a foreign writer of filth, to concisely define before the world the grand principles which govern our actions. If, like a boomerang, it hits back, our foreign foe has no one to blame but himself.

Nobody found it necessary to call Comstock's attention to Bernarr Macfadden, for Mr. Macfadden was promoting a "Mammoth Physical Exhibition" in Madison Square Garden and the posters were everywhere. It was the posters to which Comstock objected. He confiscated 500 pounds of them and arrested Macfadden. Just why Anthony flew into a tantrum it would be hard to say, for the pictures were by no means daring. The advertisements consisted of photographs of the contestants of the year before. The Mammoth Physical Exhibition of 1904 had gone off almost unnoticed. Twelve young women were pictured upon the offending posters. They were warmly clad in white union suits and in addition had sashes around the waist. There was also, to be sure, one portrait of a man, the bravest of the brave, in sandals and a leopard skin. Mr. Macfadden expressed indignation at the confiscation of the pictures and the arrest. He said the purpose of the exhibition was to show how the spread of physical culture had improved the human body. "Manifestly," added the aggrieved logician, "that cannot be done if the exhibitors are covered with clothing."

Comstock took action against Macfadden on October 6, 1905. In the *Times* of October 10, the headline ran "Twenty Thousand in Crush at Beauty Show." And once again the reserves were called out. Five thousand disappointed æsthetes were turned away at the doors. Comstock had another crowd to his credit. But those who went to the show because Anthony had moved against it were not particularly grateful. According to the story in the *Times*,

they were terribly disappointed by "a tame spectacle of athletic sports" and a series of tableaux which included a chesty man as Ajax defying the lightning.

Nevertheless, the annual report of the Society for the Suppression of Vice also recorded this windmill conquest among Comstock's exploits:

As if the harvest of minds debauched, lives wrecked and souls damned was not great enough [he began], in September last, under the guise of a "Beauty Show," upon a "scientific plan," one Macfadden and his associates advertised an exhibition to be given in Madison Square Garden, wherein it was proposed to exhibit the forms of young women, denuded of their proper womanly apparel, for young men and others to look at, for pay. They sought to crowd the Hall the first night with "scientific people," as they pretended. A special effort was made to reach the "scientists" by means of a handbill displaying a number of young women, without any clothes upon them other than skin-fitting tights. These lewd pictures were sent with "complimentary tickets" to the "scientists" in saloons and barber shops especially, and to public offices.

We secured the arrest of Macfadden and his assistant, seizing several thousand of his vile handbills in the windows of his place appealing to the "scientific" boys and girls who might stop to gaze, to their ruin, upon these degrading displays.

One of the rewards for duty well done, was the following atrocious libel, recently printed in one of Macfadden's publications:

"The most infernal enemy to the boys and girls of this country, and of all countries where the English language is spoken and read, is Comstock."

There is more of the same order, but this will show the condition of mind of those who are prosecuted for putting out matter, the tendency of which is to degrade youthful lives.

The Board of Managers, who have been in close touch with Mr. Comstock for years, indignantly repel this monstrous libel and certify to our friends and to the world at large, to Mr. Comstock's fidelity. He has well earned the title, "Children's Friend."

Macfadden was found guilty but sentence was suspended, much to Comstock's annoyance.

Nudity was much on Comstock's mind in 1905, and it was in this year that he made one of the most amazing out-breaks of his career. In the window of William Macbeth, art dealer, at 237 Fifth Avenue, there hung a painting by Bryson Burroughs called "The Explorers." It shows five small children wading in a brook. Comstock, passing by, stepped in to say the picture must be taken out of the window, although he did not care how prominently it was displayed in the gallery itself.

"I have been debating in my mind," Mr. Macbeth told the reporters, "the fine distinction Mr. Comstock has drawn. I can show the picture as much as I like inside the gallery, can call the attention of every caller to it, and presumably can even advertise it in the papers. On the other hand I mustn't show it in the window. In other words I can corrupt the public as much as I like in one part of the gallery, but must not do so in another.

"I don't know what is coming next. If there is no innocence in the portrayal of young childhood as it is, I'm afraid there is no innocence anywhere. I have another picture here of some boys at a swimming pool and that one there shows a baby's foot. Who knows? Perhaps they will have to be turned toward the wall."

But Anthony was merely warming up for his best-known escapade in the field of art. This did not occur until eight years later. "September Morning," by Paul Chabas, had received the medal of honor in the Paris Spring Salon of 1912. The first complaint against the sale of reproductions in this country came from Chicago, where Bath House John Coughlin, the alderman, announced they could not be displayed in the stores of that city.

"September Morning" was published in the United



HOW THE GREAT REFORMER WOULD HAVE IT.

Comstock's repressive influence in art had been ridiculed long before the case of the Art Students' League. This cartoon is taken from "Life" of March 8, 1888,



"A Scene in the Moral Future" is the title of a drawing made by Charles Dana Gibson for "Life" of January 12, 1888. Under the influence of "the suggestive reformer," horses, dogs and birds have acquired trousers,

States by Braun and Company, and in May, 1913, a copy of the picture appeared in the window of their shop at 13 West Forty-sixth Street, New York. The yarn has been circulated that Comstock's attention was purposely called to the picture by the proprietor who wished to boom the sales. This story is denied by people in the Society for the Suppression of Vice. Comstock sent an assistant to look at the picture, and the man came back and reported that in his opinion it was not actionable. Comstock later took a look for himself and probably came to the same conclusion. It is well to remember that he took no action against the picture but merely ordered it removed from the window. M. Philippe Ortiz, the manager, was absent when Comstock called and a clerk was in charge. "It is not a proper picture to be shown to boys and girls," Comstock told him. "There is nothing more sacred than the form of woman, but it must not be denuded. I think every one will agree with me that such pictures should not be displayed where school children passing through the streets can see them."

The clerk obeyed Comstock and removed the picture. But Ortiz on his return put it back again and kept it there two weeks out of sheer defiance, for it was the custom to limit tenure of the show-window to a single week for each picture. Ortiz would have flaunted "September Morning" even longer, but the crowds which gathered around his shop kept customers away. Comstock never came back. The picture sold hugely, and indeed some people went into the print publishing business merely for the sake of handling this picture.

Comstock's only revenge in the matter was mild and roundabout. After the vogue of the Chabas picture began to pass some novelty dealer introduced a burlesque of the canvas in which a masked burglar confronted the nude young bather, saying "Hands up." And she, apparently, obeyed

him. One or two dealers who sold this picture were arrested and convicted.

Incidentally, for a long time Anthony Comstock did not quite get the idea when various artists objected that certain pictures should not be molested because "they had hung in the Paris Salon." At least Anthony writes in one report that he has taken action against photographs of paintings "which had been exhibited in the Saloons of Paris." A typographical error would be one explanation.

Anthony was no friend of photographic art, for in *Traps for the Young* he contends that a photographic reproduction of a work of art may be far more powerful for evil than the original. Or perhaps that *is* being friendly. At any rate he wrote in his chapter entitled "Artistic and Classical Traps":

A work of art is made up of many elements that are wanting in a photograph of the same, precisely as there is a difference between a woman in her proper womanly apparel and modest appearance, and when shorn of all these and posed in a lewd posture. Because we are above savages, we clothe our nakedness. So with a work of art as compared to a copy; in the first there are things which call for a division of attention; the artist has expended much time to bring his picture to perfection. The lines of beauty, the mingling colors, tintings, and shadings all seem to clothe the figures by diverting attention from that which, if taken alone, is objectionable, with a surrounding which protects its offensive character. In other words, that which, if taken alone, is offensive to good morals, is unmasked in the copy.

The paragraph is not altogether clear, but Mr. Comstock apparently means to say that in the original the exquisite blue of the sky or the green of the foreground may happily keep the spectator from looking at the nude herself.

In this same chapter Comstock makes short work of *The Decameron*.

Take, for instance, a well-known book written by Boccaccio [he writes]. This will illustrate the prevailing practice, and the obstacles met in the efforts not to suppress its sale to literary men and students, but to prevent this, like a wild beast, from breaking loose and destroying the youth of the land. The morals of the youth first. Virtuous men come from pure-minded boys, not from those whose thoughts are charged with filth.

Indeed, Anthony was disposed to dismiss much of the literature of France and Italy rather lightly.

Many of these stories [he observes, referring to French and Italian novels in general], are little better than histories of brothels and prostitutes, in these lust-cursed nations. How often are found in these villainous stories, heroines, lovely, excellent, cultivated, wealthy, and charming in every way, who have for their lovers married men; or, after marriage, lovers flock about the charming young wife, enjoying privileges belonging only to the husband! How often does the young wife in these accursed stories have a lover more wealthy and accomplished than the one to whom she has plighted her love! Clandestine meetings are described, and plots and conspiracies to put the husband out of the way are not infrequent.

What is the lesson to the young? A light estimate upon maiden virtue and marriage vows. A putting of vile thoughts and suggestions into the minds of the young. Sowing the seeds of lust.

But *Hagar Revelly* was not like this, and yet Comstock proceeded against it. This novel by Daniel Carson Goodman was published in January, 1913, but Comstock took no action until the following September, when he led a spectacular raid upon the office of Mitchell Kennerley. The publisher and a clerk were arrested, and all the available copies of the book were seized. The clerk was fined \$50 in the New York State Court, but Kennerley's case went to a United States Court, where he was acquitted in spite

of a most unfavorable charge by the judge. Just why there should have been any commotion about the book, it is hard to say. *Hagar Revelly* was one of many books which came out of the discovery that vice had an economic side. In those days the assumption prevailed that practically all unchastity could be traced to low wages. Daniel Carson Goodman wrote an earnest story of two shop-girls, only one of whom went wrong. Seemingly, Anthony Comstock read only the seduction scenes and skipped the moral lesson.

Almost the last crusade for purity which the Old Man made came to nothing but a rebuke from district attorney, Charles Whitman. In the year 1914, only a few months after the beginning of the war, Charles Frohman presented *The Beautiful Adventure* from the French of R. de Flers and A. de Caillavet. It was favorably reviewed. In the year 1914 the dramatic critics were many of them members of the younger generation; they did not seem even to play with the thought that it was shocking. Surely the story was hardly a novelty:

Helene finds on the eve of her wedding that she cannot bear the thought of marrying the dull lawyer to whom her aunt has betrothed her. In her wedding dress she flies with the man she loves, leaving the bridegroom and the assembled guests waiting. They reach the home of her grandmother (played, of course, by Mrs. Whiffen) and the grandmother thinks the lover is *Helene's* husband. She believes that if a sprig of rosemary is placed at the door of a bridal chamber, there will be a son in the family. And so she goes at night with her rosemary to the door, only to find the young man sleeping in an armchair outside. She shoos him into the room, and the tactful *Sun* remarked, "The situation leaves the audience in no doubt that the wedding bells will ring in the morning."

All this was in 1914, and naturally enough Mrs. Whiffen

was making her farewell appearance. Charles Cherry was the lover, and some of the critics thought him a little too old for the part. Ernest Lawford played the disappointed suitor and Ann Murdock was *Helene*. Anthony Comstock, the veteran vice-hunter, made his complaint to Whitman, the brisk and snappy prosecutor. And back to the Old Man came the reply, "The play is a sprightly comedy of the French type and contains no objectionable matter."

Anthony must have had some realization then that time had passed him by. Sprightly comedy of the French type! For more than forty years Comstock had been battling against sprightly French pictures and books and plays and cuff buttons, and hurling them back as "insidious foreign nastiness." And now a young district attorney told him that there was nothing objectionable in this "degrading spectacle." All his life the Old Man had impressed upon himself and others that his was a fine and noble job. "Comstockery—the applying of the noblest principles of law . . . in the interest of Public Morals, especially those of the young." The Old Man wrote that. And now this younger generation which he had protected was grown up and members of it were holding public office. Mr. Whitman was old enough to remember how obscenity had flourished back in the days when Anthony was so busy down in his nice cool sewer. And yet he had the audacity to tell the Old Man he was in error about his specialty. It was as if somebody had said to a great and veteran musician, "But, my dear fellow, you are just a shade tone-deaf." Or to a connoisseur of wines, "You're wrong, that's claret and not burgundy."

Anthony was amazed and within a year he died.

H. B.

CHAPTER XVI

THE OLD MAN

THE Old Man was a public institution. He had always possessed a genius for attracting notice. But never in the days when his arm was strong for a lusty foray on the male-factors did he command the attention which was bestowed on him in the years of his decline. Comstock had become a name from which to weave headlines. In his own person he embodied many of those qualities of which his native land was accused. A gawky young democracy was dimly self-conscious, half-ashamed, desirous of sophistication. Under criticism, it flinched. Did some one cry Puritan, provincial, uncivilized? It was easy to compensate by railing at the Old Man. To his youthful countrymen, he had become a great tradition, a joke, a scapegoat.

For this they thought of him contemptuously, seeing in him the apotheosis, the exaggeration of all that they obscurely desired to evade in themselves. They had stepped out of the nineties, they were making gigantic strides in the dawn of the new Twentieth Century. Anthony Comstock remained behind, to remind them, like a collarless papa by the fireside, of the unfashionable origins from which they had risen. In this man, as in the God he worshipped, there was no variableness, neither any shadow of turning. As he had lived, so he was to die—a four-square granite monument to the Puritan tradition, which all the slugs and missiles of forty years had been unable to chip.

Vigorous and energetic, he had yet been frequently in-

disposed. He suffered from the great American ailment, indigestion, and his irregular habits and choleric nature must have increased this unhappy tendency. Often his lunch consisted of a piece of apple-pie or a slice of fruit-cake bolted at a lunch counter. In August of 1903, he was on the verge of nervous prostration—from overwork, according to the doctor's report. And, so weakened, he made early in October a trip to New Haven to arrest a physician of that city who had been accused of sending improper matter through the mails. As he entered the house, the doctor ran upstairs. Like a flash, Anthony was after him. He grabbed his victim's leg. But, with a mighty kick, the doctor flung him back. Down he crashed, the stout heavy bulk of him. Three fractured ribs, contusions and serious internal injuries were the price of that performance of duty.

He was fifty-nine years old, and the shock was a severe one. For months he was confined in the square frame Summit house with the porches and cupolas. Now, in addition to Jennie, there was another invalid who needed Maggie's care. In December, very weak, he dragged himself to the office, against medical advice. But soon he was in bed again, and during the holidays his life was despaired of. He seemed feeble and old when he returned to work in the late winter, and the good gentlemen of the Society sent him to Atlantic City for a month's convalescence. In the summer of 1904, he took two months' vacation. But he was very impatient over these enforced absences from duty. During the summer he conducted a voluminous correspondence, and by fall he was back again—back to the street pedlars, back to the pictures in the cigar-store windows, back to the nastinesses imported from foreign foes.

He was functioning once more, but there had been a change. His physician reported that after the New Haven accident Anthony Comstock was altered. Always high-

strung, from this time forward he became more quickly excitable, more easily unnerved. He was not so strong as formerly. In 1907, when Maggie, Jennie and the servant were all ill with pneumonia, he, too, succumbed to the disease, and the doctor ascribed his illness to exposure in his weakened condition—for those injuries were still troubling him. That backward thrust of the medico's foot had knocked the crusader over the subtle line between the vigorous middle years and old age.

Yet we would not imply that the Old Man was inactive. Read, in controversion of such an idea, a letter quoted by Trumbull, which Comstock wrote in 1908:

You may be interested to know that on Tuesday, at half-past nine, I was at work here in the office (New York). In the afternoon, at three o'clock, I was in Providence, Rhode Island, before the Federal Grand Jury, where I had a party indicted. I took supper in Boston, and arose about three o'clock on Wednesday morning in St. Johnsbury, Vermont. I went to a hotel and had about two and one-half hours' sleep, when I got up, and went out to hunt up a United States Commissioner, who very kindly got up out of bed to sign my warrants, which I had already prepared for his signature. I had about ten minutes for breakfast, and then took the 6:45 train for East Hardwick, Vermont, where I arrived in a snow-storm. I hired a carriage and drove about a mile into the country, stopped at a farmhouse, and asked a boy who came out of the wood-shed if Leon was home. He said, "Yes, he's in there." I jumped out of the carriage and went into the wood-shed, and found the party I was after actually employed in his developing-room, in one corner of the wood-shed. Fortunately for me, he had the door unlocked and open. He came out as I entered and we walked back, and I was fortunate enough to seize the negatives from which he was making his infamous pictures, and also his stock in trade.

We gave him a chance to wash up and dress, then drove about two miles and a half across country, flagged a train at a flag station, and were back in St. Johnsbury about noon,

where I had this man committed by the Commissioner on two charges, in default of \$1,000 bail on each charge. I placed him in jail by order of the Commissioner; took the 2:20 train back to Boston, where I had my supper; and awoke the next morning about six o'clock in New York. I had my breakfast and went to the office.

This morning I came here about nine o'clock, and had to go immediately to court, where I had another party held to await trial in our local courts here. This makes ninety-nine arrests for this year.

Comstock was to remain a fighter to the last. He might be stiff and battle-scarred, but still he swung a formidable right. Sometimes he fought in strange company. From 1906 until 1908, the Thaw case smeared the press. The grim countenance of our crusader had a place in its columns. Many months before the murder Harry Thaw had gone to Comstock's little office in Nassau Street to complain of the goings-on in Stanford White's studio in the tower of Madison Square Garden. Comstock, properly outraged, had investigated. Two men had been detailed to watch White's studio, but there was not enough evidence to secure his arrest.

One of the incidents widely cited in proof of the depravity of White and his associates was the "girl in the pie" dinner, given in the studio of James Lawrence Breese. The feature of this occasion was the entrance of four brawny waiters, bearing an enormous pie. At a given signal a fifteen-year-old girl, scantily draped in black, stepped from the pie, releasing twenty-four canaries. Stories of the young model's subsequent unhappy fate contributed to the bad odor of the dinner. Perhaps Comstock derived an ironic satisfaction from the fact that among the guests at this disgraceful feast were certain of the prominent artists whose names had been appended to the resolutions drawn against him in connection with the Knoedler affair.

Harry Thaw, indicted by the Grand Jury for the murder of Stanford White, sent for Comstock to come to the Tombs. To reporters the Old Man seems to have talked freely, denouncing White and expressing sympathy for Thaw. The *Evening Mail* of June 28, 1906, carried a long interview in which Comstock told of his investigations of Thaw's stories of the practices of White and his friends.

Mr. Thaw ever seemed to me to be actuated by the purest motives in his effort to bring to justice the fashionable degenerates whom he held responsible for so much misery and so many ruined lives [the vice-hunter is reported to have said].

The stories of human depravity among the wealthy "respectables" which he told and which we unearthed, I believed preyed upon his mind to such an extent that he was led to commit the crime with which he now stands charged. . . .

The terror occasioned by the fear that one dear to him might have become under the influence of or befouled by such moral lepers would be more than sufficient to unsettle any man's mind and to make him feel that he was doing a service to society by wiping them from the face of the earth.

Since I have been interested in this work, I have found that the blackest mud is to be found behind the trees on which the sun shines brightest. In that shadow the slime lies thick.

The Twentieth Century had plenty of new horrors for the Old Man. There was the tango, there was the sheath skirt, there was *Three Weeks*. There was a writer called Havelock Ellis, whose book, *Erotic Symbolism*, Comstock brought into court in 1913, securing the penalty of a fine. In that same year—which witnessed also his objections to "September Morning" and *Hagar Revelly*—the vice-hunter was in a state of agitation over those shameless hus-sies, the suffragettes. Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst had brought to these shores a goodly supply of copies of *The Suffragette*, the official organ of the English militants. In these were included several articles on prostitution by Chris-

tabel Pankhurst, which had also been assembled in a book called *Plain Facts About a Great Evil*.

Anthony had declared that the Rockefeller report on the white slave traffic could not be admitted to the mails, and the Pankhurst writings he promptly judged unfit for general distribution. "I see no reason," he was quoted as saying, "why we should have the sewerage of Great Britain dumped on our shores." But his metaphor referred to the unseemly articles—not in any sense to the visiting militants. Odious as they must have been to him, he showed an admirable restraint in referring to these ladies. Though he spoke darkly of arrests in a two-hour conference with Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont, his attack seems to have petered out in vague threats.

The advocates of birth control had always evoked Comstock's wrath. In his old age he saw these people growing more numerous, more brazen. To a woman reporter for the *Tribune*, in May, 1915, he reluctantly spoke on this delicate subject. "Are we to have homes or brothels?" he cried, and "Can't everybody, whether rich or poor, learn to control themselves?" Margaret Sanger's pamphlet, *Family Limitation*, had aroused his horror. "In my opinion, this book is contrary not only to the law of the State, but to the law of God . . ." said Justice McInerney at the trial of William Sanger in September, 1915. "If some of these women who go around advocating Woman Suffrage would go around and advocate women having children, they would be rendering society a greater service." So, only a few days before the Old Man's death, the voice of his period judicially spoke, and perhaps he died content in the knowledge that there were many left to carry on his work. William Sanger had been arrested in January, 1915, for distributing his wife's pamphlet. The evidence was secured by an agent of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, and

this must have been one of the last trials in which Anthony Comstock gave testimony. Sanger, despite his protests in the courtroom that he was himself the father of "three lovely children," was convicted, and chose to go to jail for thirty days rather than pay a fine of \$150.

As he marched bellicosely through his sixties, Comstock had laid about him with mighty strokes. He was a proud man, an energetic man, and he had those sixty-one cars to fill. If his crusades were often launched against trifles, he seemed unconscious of it. He was witnessing just as valiantly for the Lord. Like the man in the fairy-tale, he boasted that he could slay seven at a blow—even though that meant seven flies. Comstock had wrestled with giants. He had broken publishers, he had worsted the Louisiana Lottery; and raiding gambling saloons had been a strong man's job. But now the Old Man dashed his thunderbolts against bridge games played for prizes. He had a woman arrested for calling her husband a "spitzbub" on a postal card. Roman Catholic churches were learning to dread this spoiler of their raffles for building funds. Nudity troubled him more and more. By 1911 he was having unclad wax figures taken out of the window of a Broadway garment manufacturer. He protested against the display of photographs of athletes exercising in trunks. In 1913, there were the incidents of "September Morning" and Macfadden's Mammoth Physical Exhibition.

Finally, in 1914, his ire was kindled by the cover of a February issue of the *Chautauquan*, the official organ of the Chautauqua Institute. That conscientious weekly, in furtherance of a program of education, had undertaken to reproduce art objects from various museums throughout the United States. A photograph of an antique statue of a naked faun was the contribution of the museum of the University of Pennsylvania. It was, in Comstock's opinion,

"a most indecent thing to send into homes where there may be young girls." But at length he decided not to prosecute, if the offense were not repeated.

The Old Man had never been willing to listen to reason when the fight for righteousness was concerned. Now he was growing completely out of hand. People were laughing at him—partly it was the laughter which disowns the qualities ridiculed, partly it was the easy laughter which tells of relief at a danger which is past. The tiger's claws were dulled. Few remained who would pay him that tribute he had won in his riper years—the honest tribute of hate. They invented sarcastic names for him, "an incorporated conscience," "the modern Galahad," "the unsleeping protector of the morals of the metropolis."

But in his personal associations he could still arouse a bitter animosity. That irascible temper of his had not been bettered by the kick that sent him down the doctor's stairs. The proud Old Man vented his domineering and arrogant nature on those whom he encountered. In the courts he was unpopular. Most of his courtroom quarrels came from the fact that he thought he knew more about law than the lawyers. Had he not been preparing cases and giving testimony for years and years? He had been versed in such matters before many of these young upstarts were born. After a time, it was no longer news if Anthony Comstock was insulted by a prosecuting attorney. In 1913, in the course of a characteristic fracas, he hotly referred to the prosecutor as "a mere slip of a boy." The following year, when a United States assistant district attorney found his evidence insufficient, the vice-hunter burst out, "You are nothing but a little boy trying to tell me my business." He argued with policemen and instructed judges. Frequently he was ordered from the court. The Old Man would shout and pound on the rail in his excitement. There would be

the crash of a gavel. And out he would stamp in a huff, his countenance purple, his snowy whiskers bristling.

In the town of Summit he was generally respected—he triumphantly ferreted out the perpetrators of a series of burglaries committed there—but his temper led him into occasional disputes. Notable among these was his prolonged quarrel with James Perry, a Negro hackman at the Summit station. Anthony's home was outside the limits of the town, and the amount he paid for the ride on one occasion was unsatisfactory to the Negro, who refused to drive him. Comstock thereafter would sneak up to the hack and jump in before Perry saw him. Once the Negro hailed the crusader into court, complaining that Comstock had persecuted him and called him bad names. Eventually Perry was found guilty of violating a city ordinance in refusing to drive Comstock.

The obstinacy with which he pursued this dispute illustrates the bad temper which increased in the Old Man as the years passed. In his office there were constant quarrels. Sometimes there were as many as twelve different stenographers in a single year. To one employee he shouted in a moment's irritation, "Get out of here, you pesky old maid!" Charles Bamberger, who acted as his assistant for nearly twenty years, grew accustomed to being dismissed in a whirlwind of temper. After a few days Comstock would be after him to come back to work.

The office was accustomed to hearing that Comstock was in trouble. One day, in 1906, the vice-hunter left to go to court on one of his cases. He had been gone only a few minutes when the telephone rang. It was a reporter from the *Sun*. "Was Mr. Comstock punched in the face in court this morning?" he inquired. "Probably," answered Bamberger with resignation. It developed that Mr. Comstock had been. Hugh Gordon Miller, formerly United States

district attorney in Virginia, had been moved to violence because Anthony had called him a liar. Though the sympathies of the onlookers seem to have been against Comstock, the gentleman from Virginia does not appear in a very favorable light. After all, he had started it by accusing the vice-hunter of browbeating prisoners. He had more than a quarter century's advantage in years, and the Old Man did not strike back. Later, he said that he restrained himself out of respect for the dignity of the court.

Some months later, as he entered the Nassau Street building, Bamberger was addressed by the elevator man. "Did you see what happened to your boss?" Inquiry led Comstock's assistant to the nearest drug store, where the dazed crusader sat, his head and face badly cut. Another flight of stairs had caused these injuries—the stairs leading down to Hitchcock's restaurant in Park Row. "Was it an accident or were you pushed?" asked Bamberger suspiciously. Oh, it had been an accident—he had caught his heel. But Bamberger persisted. Was he sure no one had pushed him? "No, no, no, Charlie," the Old Man protested, fretfully. When his head was tied up, Charlie led him out, a very rakish old crusader, with his hat pushed on one side on account of the bandages. So he went home to Maggie, to be taken care of again.

Whatever suspicions Bamberger cherished, he did not learn the cause of the accident—until more than ten years after Comstock's death. Then casually one day a policeman described to him an occurrence he had witnessed many years before in front of Hitchcock's restaurant in Park Row. An Irishman had brushed against Anthony, who had retaliated by knocking him into the gutter. So Charlie was right. Mr. Comstock had been pushed, after all. The policeman had not interfered because the vice-hunter was in the wrong.

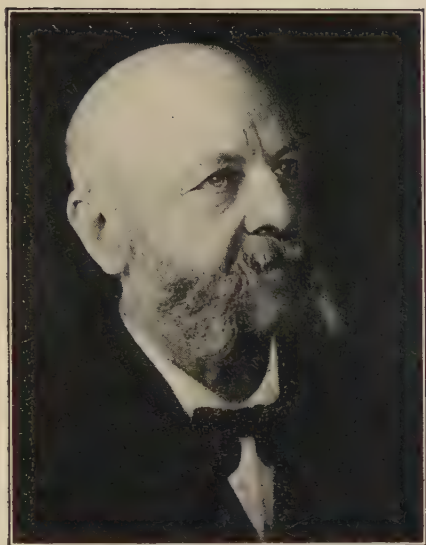
Yet these outbreaks were the petulant and ineffectual

tantrums of a man past his prime. In 1910, at a meeting in the Labor Temple at Second Avenue and Fourteenth Street, he was heckled by Emma Goldman. A member of the audience remembers that he stood on the platform, his face as red as fire. The interruptions must have disconcerted him; and he was pleased when a woman rose from her seat to protest that the Old Man should be allowed to go on.

In spite of his irascibility, he could be amazingly gentle. He performed many kindnesses. Maggie's invalid sister, Jennie, made her home with the Comstocks. Out of his small resources he had helped his father, whose second marriage had brought him four sons. Comstock rented a house in Brooklyn and installed the family there. After his father's death, he contributed to his stepmother's support. And, when one of his half-brothers left his wife, he gave financial assistance to her and her children.

Nowhere is Anthony's tenderness for children more touchingly shown than in his relation with his defective adopted daughter, Adele. She was not a lovable child. She was vain and disagreeable, and she grew into a vain and disagreeable woman. But she loved her foster father, and in return he gave her a loyal and blind devotion. He would not listen to tales about Adele, would not believe that she was difficult, that she told many lies. Though she was a woman of over forty when Comstock died, he never thought of her as grown-up. "Oh, she's just a child," was his answer to any criticism.

For over forty years of the crusader's life, a host of bitter enemies had ceaselessly attacked him. They had shouted denunciations. They had diligently sought for evidence. It is amazing that they found so little. What a sweet to roll under their tongues, if they could have caught him in some sexual delinquency! But none could be found, and none was even suggested. The only questionable thing



(Left) Toward the close of his life, the crusader's face lost much of its harshness, and assumed the mild, bewildered expression which frequently accompanies age. (Below) In a cartoon from "The Masses" of September, 1915, Anthony is represented as saying to the judge, "Your Honor, this woman gave birth to a naked child."



Drawn by Robert Minor.



Comstock's abhorrence of nudity led him to execrate pictures and statues usually regarded as entirely innocent. "September Morning" (above) attracted wide publicity to his prejudice against the undraped human form. He also vehemently objected to the reproduction of a statue of a faun from Lake Nemi in Italy (left) which appeared on the cover of the "Chautauquan."

which Comstock had done he had himself described under oath in court. In the earlier days of his work he had once gone to a brothel in Greene Street which was obviously under police protection. In company with three others, he had watched an exhibition which was the drawing card of the house, and then had arrested the participants. His enemies made what they could of the fact that he had stayed for the exhibition before making the arrests. Aside from this, they were forced to call him sexless, or to exploit his hatred of pornographic writings and pictures as inspired by an inverted pruriency.

Attacks on his honesty recurred at intervals during his career. He was accused of accepting bribes, and in several cases won libel suits against his detractors. No one who knew Comstock well credited such statements. Dishonesty is not among the vices of the staunch Puritan, and Comstock possessed in high degree the virtues of his type. Parsimonious he undoubtedly was. But he never possessed the means for extravagance. When he went to Washington in 1873, he was given one hundred dollars a month by his committee. At the time of his death, after forty-three years of work, he was receiving a salary of five thousand dollars a year. Though he lived simply, he had many mouths to feed. Often he was pinched for money. When the funds of the Society were low, it was a hardship to have his salary held up, as on several occasions it was. His house in Summit was mortgaged, and his will was concerned with a few thousand dollars. Yet we remember that he had refused offers which would have tempted a richer man—notably in the cases of Restell and the Louisiana Lottery. He had always turned over to the Society the witness fees which he received, and at his death these contributions had totalled more than twenty thousand dollars. He had refused to take any money from the Post Office until a salary was

forced upon him in 1906. Had his conscience been more elastic, Anthony Comstock could, even without dishonesty, have done considerably better for himself than he did.

But even those who knew and respected him agreed that the Old Man was getting past his usefulness. He grew forgetful. On his annual trip to Boston to speak at the Park Street Church, he became confused, could not remember why he had gone there. He had to call Bamberger on the long distance telephone to ask where he should go. The beginning of 1913 saw a new name in the annual report of the Society's activities—John S. Sumner, Assistant Secretary. The good gentlemen of his committee felt that Mr. Comstock was making them look foolish. They wanted a secretary of a different sort—a young, moderate, dignified man, with nothing of the fanatic about him. We wonder how he bore the introduction of an assistant—surely he must have realized that the reins were being slipped into more vigorous hands. But, if the innovation wounded him, he could at least retain the prestige of his position. He had his salary. He had his Post Office commission. He was free to hurry about on the round of activities he knew and loved—arresting the dealers in pornography, making innumerable speeches, fighting with the people in the Federal Building, attending purity congresses. Perhaps at no time had he found more pleasure in talking about his work. He had developed a psychological theory of his own; by now he had it down pat, and the formula seldom varied. "In the heart of every child there is a Chamber of Imagery—Memory's storehouse—the commissary department in which is received, stored up and held in reserve every good or evil influence for future requisition. . . . If through eye and ear—the portals to the Chamber of Imagery—the sensuous book, picture or story is allowed to enter, the thoughts will be corrupted, the conscience seared, the heart

hardened and the soul damned. . . . Like an electric wire connected with a magazine of powder, which requires but a touch of the button to carry destruction in its wake, so sensuous pictures and stories, reproduced by fancy in the thoughts, awaken forces for evil, which often explode with irresistible force, carrying to destruction every human safeguard to virtue and honor. . . .”

One who admired him in his later days said that he was like an old prophet. An old fulminating, angry, baleful prophet, looking abroad on a world he had been able to remould very little nearer to his heart's desire. He breathed out hints and threatenings. “Imagine the worst” is a dark phrase sometimes seen in his later reports. For years he had been referring to Sodom—the word had a rich, Biblical turpitude about it which must have pleased him. “Only those familiar with the history of Sodom can imagine—” that was a fine, sinister beginning for an obscurely related story of vice. But we do not feel that Mr. Comstock himself can have been among those familiar with the history of Sodom. He used the expression without precision.

We have one vivid picture of him toward the end of his life. A woman had brought an erotic postcard, and placed it in the Old Man's hand. It was of German manufacture, and the American flag figured, without dignity, in the scene. He glanced at the picture, turned away, his hand pressed over his eyes. He had been looking on evil things so long, the old prophet. Could it be that his eyelids were a little weary? But no, he had only paused to breathe a prayer at the desecration of his country's emblem.

In June, 1915, his world once more seemed ready to crash about his ears. There were rumors, more persistent than ever, that he had lost his Post Office appointment. “I don't care,” the Old Man told reporters, “I don't care.” It was generally believed that official opposition, emanating

chiefly from the Federal Building, was responsible for his losing his commission, and Comstock charged that there was a plot to get rid of him. The reporters, making inquiry at the office of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, stripped the crusader of his remaining dignity. It was announced that, since the beginning of the year, Mr. Comstock's connection with the Society had been a nominal one. Mr. Sumner was actually the executive head. His methods were less sensational than Mr. Comstock's had been, and he was opposed to publicity. The Society was to return to its original intention—the protection of the youth of both sexes—"as in the old days when Comstock was in his prime," reported the *Tribune* of June 11, 1915, "and confined his activities to that class of work."

Three months later the crusader will have ceased to trouble them. The announcements that an old man is being shoved on the dust heap seem very callous. But, amazingly, he weathered this storm, as he had weathered so many others. In July he declared that he had known all along the plot would fail. And then he was appointed by President Wilson as a delegate to represent the United States at the International Purity Congress at the San Francisco Exposition. "He was with us on our special train to San Francisco in 1915," wrote Mr. B. S. Steadwell, the president of the World's Purity Federation, "and he and I were together very much of the time. I shall never forget how he used to throw his arm around my shoulder and declare the wonders and mercies of God."

It was a hard trip, and Comstock made many speeches. He took cold, and when he came back to the office late in August, the people there saw a change in the Old Man. He seemed slowed up. He went to Asbury Park over Labor Day, but he was running a temperature; and not long after he returned to Summit pneumonia developed. From this

he seemed to rally. On the twentieth of September he was strong enough to dictate to a stenographer some notes on matters pertaining to the Society, but on the evening of the twenty-first he died quite suddenly and quietly while his doctor stood by his bedside.

At the funeral they called him "a soldier of righteousness," and spoke of his love for little children. The church was banked with floral offerings, and his coffin was draped with an American flag—he had, after some protest and dissension on the part of the members, been admitted to a Brooklyn Post of the G.A.R. The honorary pall-bearers were all worthy gentlemen, and the newspapers for the most part paid a dignified tribute to his long years of work. They filed his will for probate—his small estate included the mortgaged house in Summit, two insurance policies of \$3,000 each, his stamp collection and a painting of Sheridan at Cedar Creek. He was buried in Evergreen Cemetery, Brooklyn, where three years later Maggie would be laid beside him. On his tombstone they carved "In memory of a fearless witness," and below this the text, from Hebrews 12, "Lay aside every weight—looking unto Jesus—despising the shame." A tiny tombstone in the plot, carved with a lily, recorded that Lillie P. Comstock had been born December 4, 1871, and died June 28, 1872.

The shouts of opposition had failed of their effect, for Anthony Comstock believed in himself and his work to the end. To him it had been a holy cause, and he had never been able to discriminate clearly between agnosticism and obscenity. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that he shall also reap." These words were often on his lips, triumphantly, in the last years of his life. When in June of 1915 the Society talked about returning to its original intention of protecting the young, the Old Man must have felt bewildered. For

whatever activities might consume his days—whether he had been pursuing the quack advertisements, the swindling schemes, lotteries, gambling saloons, the odious writings of the infidels—all these things he dramatized as a defense of little children. It was necessary to do so. Not only must others be impressed. There was also himself. So, to the very end, he saw his work in terms of theater. Fathers were always shrinking back aghast. Mothers were crazed by anguish. Sons and daughters of the wealthiest families were incurring loathsome habits. Seminaries were in daily receipt of leprous matter. Despair—corruption—suicide—a trail of wasted lives—the hydra-headed monster, obscenity—this was his battle-cry, this his consecration, this, as the years passed, the fantasy which sustained him.

In all the intense activity of his long and busy life, he seems to have learned very little. Mentally he was always of the stature of that pious unlettered New England lad who had come to New York in the sixties. He had travelled widely in his own country, but of other countries he knew little, and it is doubtful if he cared to learn more. Paris and Rome and Berlin were cities that the dirty postcards came from.

What was this man? The ignorant foe of culture? The symbol of American provincialism and intolerance? The cruel and fanatical bigot? Or the defender of little children? The fearless witness for the right? God's soldier? Perhaps he was all these things, in that strange and fateful medley which makes up a human soul.

The record of the man, Anthony Comstock, is diffuse. It sprawls amorphously across our pages. From this clutter of good report and evil, how can we select a label, how epitomize the confusion in a pat and simple phrase? These biographers turn from the task. Perhaps concerning this man they know too little—or too much.

On the last day of the year 1873, in the full vigor of his young manhood, Anthony Comstock confided to his pocket diary grave thoughts about the dying year. Let them stand here at the close of his life.

“One heart throb and all is over. How stands the record? Things I ought to have done left undone, done things I ought not, stumbled and fallen many times, sinned over and over again, all unworthiness—yet, blessed thought, one Name is all sufficient. To that dear refuge let me fly.”

M. L.

BROUN ON CENSORSHIP

BROUN ON CENSORSHIP

AFTER Anthony there came many to engage in supervision and suppression. Henry L. Mencken has stated in *A Book of Prefaces* that moral endeavor has become a recognized profession in this country and Mr. Mencken mentions Mr. Comstock as the father of the craft. In this I see a misconception. Though Comstock was the best known of all vice-hunters he remained until the end a talented amateur. He loved his job. The pay was incidental. Men more slick and wise have taken over the functions which once were his but not one of them can contribute the same enthusiasm to the task. Anthony Comstock had moral earnestness and it can't be faked. His concern was with Puritan theology rather than Puritan ethics. Righteousness seemed to him less important than salvation and consequently tricks which seemed shabby to neutrals left him without shame. A man who fights for the safety of his immortal soul can hardly be expected to live up to the best Queensberry traditions in the clinches. To grant the major premises of Comstock's religious and social philosophy is to acquit him of any lack of logic. Obscenity was to Anthony poison to soul and body, and anything remotely touching upon sex was to his mind obscene. He seems to have believed implicitly in medical theories which have since his time been discarded. Even in his day beliefs were changing, but Comstock was loyal to the old-line ideas. It was his notion that idiocy, epilepsy and locomotor-ataxia were

among the ailments for which auto-eroticism was responsible. Since death and damnation might be, according to his belief, the portion of the girl or boy who read a ribald story, it is easy to understand why he was so impatient with those who advanced the claims of art. Even those who love beauty would hardly be prepared to burn in hell forever in its service. Comstock's decision was even easier, for he did not know, understand or care anything about beauty. In all sincerity he was puzzled by the liberals who opposed him. It was not merely a snide device by which he invariably intimated that they must have some financial interest in pornography. He could not grasp any other reason for disagreement with his principles.

One point may be scored against him even within sight of his chosen position. While he reduced the quantity of erotic literature, his campaign of suppression did much to increase eagerness and curiosity about forbidden books. If in his boyhood Anthony had read Grimm in addition to the stories from the Bible, he might have grasped the idea that the surest way to toll in knight and princess is to bar their way with giants and dragons. Comstock had no right to expect that he could make lasciviousness unpopular merely by pointing out the ogre-like dangers which its pursuit entailed.

Nobody but fools and censors believe so devoutly in the power of pornography. In speaking against the proposals of Justice Ford a few years ago Jimmy Walker, then a State Senator, flung at his associates the challenge: "Did you ever know a woman who was ruined by a book?"

The moral devastation which is supposed to follow in the wake of printed impropriety is largely mythical. At least the censors have never proved their case. In no court action for suppression has a horrible example ever been produced. Obviously Comstock, or any other reformer, might easily

find some boy with dirty pictures or dirty books and wring from him the confession that he was guilty of secret vice. But then you would have the old problem of the chicken and the egg and no one would be competent to tell whether the boy came to erotic thoughts by reason of the pornographic matter or whether he sought out the books and pictures because he was erotic. Comstock did not seem to realize the possibilities of spontaneous combustion among the adolescent. Many believe that Robinson Crusoe if left upon the desert island at the age of two months would not even then grow up into what Comstock called "pure-minded manhood." Since Anthony did not himself succeed *in toto*, he should have been more lenient with others who failed.

Very probably an excellent defense of out and out pornography could be written. It will not be done here because the author of such an article should be a person well trained in all the sciences which touch on human psychology. It is my own notion that an ounce of sophistication is more valuable than many pounds of purity. The boy who shudders at the approach of smut is in greater danger than the one who can say, "I've heard that one, it isn't funny any more."

But many of Comstock's cases concerned books and plays and pictures which were pornographic only by the widest stretch of the imagination. Comstock wanted judges and juries to make that stretch and often they obeyed him. He was strong in getting courts to tackle the impossible task of defining "obscenity." The natural question arises, obscene to whom? The Comstock contention was that laws must be framed to protect the most vulnerable person in the community. Even if judge, jurors and all the witnesses read an exhibit and suffered no apparent harm in soul or body, they were expected to envisage some more feeble person who would be corrupted by this same material. To

the lay mind many court decisions in regard to obscenity are exceedingly puzzling. If a man aimed a cap pistol toward the White House and said, "I'm firing at President Coolidge," I doubt if any court would hold him guilty of a crime though the judge might order an inquiry into his sanity. But, seemingly, Comstock never was called upon to prove that the thing he called "corrupting" was actually capable of achieving the dire results which he predicted. He himself afforded striking proof of the staunchness of the human soul in resisting the evil suggestions of the most vicious fictionists. Take, for instance, the case against Macfadden's Beauty Show. On posters were displayed the figures of young women in union suits and sashes. Comstock saw these pictures. If one day later Anthony had been observed walking about the streets and leering at young women, with vine leaves in his hair and tickets for Atlantic City in his pocket, then the community would have been forced to admit that such posters were dynamite and must be suppressed to preserve the legitimacy of the nation. Nothing of the sort happened. Anthony looked and was indignant. It seems rather petty that the machinery of justice should be invoked for no more weighty purpose than to keep Comstock, or some other performer, from being irritated.

Sheer nastiness is feeble stuff. When I was a youngster and carefully shielded I, too, had the romantic notion that among the forbidden books were some powerful enough to steal away the very soul. By now I have read them and another illusion is gone. There is scarcely a kick in a barrel full. By what seemed a happy chance there fell into my hands, the other afternoon, a whole library of paper-backs, prepared in Paris for the American trade. Shock was the whole objective, but it was not there. Indeed, after less

than half an hour of reading my only emotion was one of profound pity for the poor pornographers.

One author, slightly more honest than the rest, began with a preface in which he frankly admitted the difficulty of doing anything particularly interesting or novel in the matter of immoral story-telling. He said that all dirty books were dulled by a tedious sameness. But there burned in him something of that unquenchable fire of optimism which is in all mankind and he rounded off his introduction with a ringing promise that here the reader would find things more ingeniously indecent than ever yet conceived by man.

Nobody could read that introduction without being moved, and even a little fired, by the gallantry of the author. He, too, had read the copybooks and had been seduced by the maxim that there is no such word as "fail." Bravely he began, but oh the pity of it. To go on with the story was to watch the death of hope and the drooping of a flaming ambition into the dull ashes of boredom. His story was precisely the same story as every author in the series had written. Indecency is a tiny kingdom and one tour covers it. One road to purity lies in making the not particularly grand tour and being done with it.

I should like very much to be able to live again and to arrange for my own bringing up. Under such circumstances I should provide that some parent, guardian or teacher should give me a dirty book as required reading. This ought to happen at about the age of eight or nine, for at the end the little scholar could hardly fail to say, "And is this all there is to it?" Thereafter, he might mature to useful life, untroubled by vague speculations concerning the exciting horrors of the unknown. If Comstock had read *Only a Boy* when he was eleven instead of suppressing it over and over again after he'd turned twenty, the world

would have had a better man, a more useful citizen. Granted that this is merely speculation, it is still permissible since Anthony himself indulged in many conjectures as to just what would happen if some book or other were allowed free sale.

The great threat to the young and pure in heart is not what they read, but what they don't read. To forbid is to underline. Suppression is almost always a compliment and often one wholly undeserved. Great writers have lived and died, and human conduct has been affected by them to the extent perhaps of a finger-nail's thickness; and yet many blandly assume that the veriest hack can trip and overthrow mankind by using a few vulgar words set down with neither skill nor imagination.

It is not lustful thoughts which mar human personality, but only the sense of shame. Comstock spread shame about very widely and it was a force much more debilitating than any exotic notions which might have come from the books he seized.

Licentiousness is a vastly over-rated activity. Only Puritans think of the Devil as the most fascinating figure in the universe. Terrified holy men believed that he could be repulsed only by stout fasting and hearty prayer, while the one complete and perfect exorcism is to face him squarely and yawn.

It is my experience that life goes on pretty much the same as usual even when all the current books are rowdy and the prevailing theatrical fare French and farcical. I have been through seasons in which the characters in the playhouses were forever putting on pink pajamas and running into rooms and out of them, and the effect, upon at least one spectator, was not to increase the antic urge.

It may be that the influence of literature or the drama upon life is largely inverse in its ratio. One is sad and

gloomy after seeing too many "glad" plays. From plays which laud good works and high thoughts, the spectator departs to get into a poker game. Impressionable gentlemen see dramas concerning Cleopatra or Du Barry and each is reminded that he has not written to his grandmother for a month.

Once I had the opportunity to talk about books and plays with a young man in the Tombs Prison who had just been indicted for murder. Asked to outline the plot of the best book he ever read, he animatedly retold a story of a young wastrel who reformed, upon being elected mayor, and cleaned up a dissolute city by rigorously suppressing vice and crime. The young man had read and enjoyed this novel just a week before he was moved to shoot two policemen.

In the theater, at least, it is perhaps fair to ask the producer to label his products plainly. There should be some protection for the young man who wants to take Aunt Fanny to see a good show. It is not just that they should stumble upon something which is calculated to make the old lady blush and the young man squirm.

In this respect I recommend the admirable procedure of Al Woods. When he puts above his theater, as he did a few seasons ago, some such title as *Getting Gertie's Garter*, Aunt Fanny has no right to complain that wholly unawares she has come upon something shocking. Though for that matter I have never been able to understand why shocks were supposed to be so distinctly harmful. Every member of an orderly community ought to be shocked at least twice a year. Several plays within the last two or three years have shocked me, but there were no permanent ill-effects and I never thought my susceptibility was adequate cause for summoning a censor.

For whom does a censor speak? Obviously he does not limit his ban to such things as may endanger his own moral prominence. Comstock worked for many years in a sewer, as he himself described it, but he came up every now and then and went to prayer meetings, where he was accepted as devout and uncontaminated. Moncure D. Conway, a rationalist preacher of the last century, stated the case against censorship by law some years ago.

"From first to last," he wrote, "the whole procedure is speculative. It is not shown that any injury has been done; it is not shown, or even suggested, that any evil was intended; it is a decision based upon the powers of imagination, at best; more correctly, perhaps, upon capacities for panic.

"Such a decision reverses the chief aim of all real law, which is to protect the weak from the strong, to protect the individual from the brute force of majorities. It changes the jury from defenders of right to inquisitors of opinion."

The relation between play and spectator, book and reader, ought to be wholly personal. Possibly there is some need of supervision of the entertainment of the young, but this is distinctly a home duty. If I believe that certain plays will be bad for my small boy, it is my job to keep him away from them. Obviously a grossly sentimental play might be worse for him than a ribald one. Still, it would be silly for me to ask the State to suppress *Abie's Irish Rose* because it gives a view of life which seems to me harmful to a growing boy. It would be just as reasonable for me to call Al Smith by long distance telephone and say, "Dear Governor, my boy won't go to bed, please send an officer of the law to make him do it." And, after all, the fact that a book or a play is not suitable for a child hardly makes it inevitable that it should be denied to every one.

Certainly censorship of any sort should never be en-

trusted to professional crusaders. Comstock and his successors have always denied that they were censors, and technically the word does not fit precisely. Nevertheless, their activities amounted to very much the same thing. The final decision lay with the courts, but Comstock could and did harm people by his first attack. A later acquittal sometimes helped them very little. The professional crusader becomes far too sensitized to impropriety. He comes in time to find it in stones and running brooks. His eagerness for the chase distorts his judgment.

"It is hardly possible," said Sydney Smith, "that a society for the suppression of vice can ever be kept within the bounds of good sense and moderation. . . . Beginning with the best intentions in the world, such societies must, in all probability, degenerate into a receptacle for every species of tittle-tattle, impertinence and malice. Men whose trade is rat-catching love to catch rats; the bug destroyer seizes upon the bug with delight; and the suppressor is gratified by finding his vice."

Comstock endeavored with some success to establish a legal precedent which Justice Ford has recently been trying to re-establish. It was Anthony's idea that isolated passages should be enough for the prosecution of a case, and cases have been argued in that way in spite of the fact that the acceptance of the principle brands any judge as ignorant of law as well as literature. A book has no being except in its entirety.

Frequently the point has been made in this book that Anthony Comstock was by no means unique in his community. His success in court would have been altogether impossible but for the fact that many men upon the bench were almost wholly of his mind in matters relating to obscenity. Narrowest of all were the judges in the United States courts where Comstock scored many of his triumphs.

Here, for instance, is a charge delivered by Judge Phillips: *

"There is in the popular conception and heart such a thing as modesty. It was born in the Garden of Eden. After Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, they passed from that condition of perfectability, which some people nowadays aspire to, and, their eyes being opened, they discerned that there was both good and evil; 'and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together and made themselves aprons.' From that day to this civilized man has carried with him a sense of shame, the feeling that there were some things on which the eye, the mind, should not look; and where men or women become so depraved by the use, or so insensate from perverted education that they will not veil their eyes, or hold their tongues, the Government should perform the office for them in protection of the social compact and the body politic."

But truthfulness has not yet outlived its usefulness. There is no other panacea. Characters who move and have their being in a well-scrubbed world can stir no one to emulation since they must remain wraiths unrecognizable as human beings. To say that a writer shall mention nothing noxious is to condemn him to falseness. This does not produce masters.

After all it was not the novelists, not even the modern ones, who invented sex. Both the fundamentalists and the evolutionists agree that the scheme has at least the merit of antiquity. Anthony Comstock may have been entirely correct in his assumption that the division of living creatures into male and female was a vulgar mistake, but a conspiracy of silence about the matter will hardly alter the facts.

Before deciding on a line of conduct, man has an inherent

* The U. S. *vs.* Harman.

right to see samples. Morality is still a matter open to debate, and it is impertinent for any individual to assume the right to swing a gavel and shut off discussion.

The recent adventures of the many duly authorized State bodies engaged in motion picture censorship should hardly encourage America to approximate this regulation in other fields. The contention of the movie guardians has been Comstock's old demand from the publishers that pictures should be scaled down to make them suitable for the youngest and least intelligent person who might possibly be in the audience. Since some parents have brought up children upon the story of the stork, that bird becomes all the biology that may be permitted on the screen. In Pennsylvania, it is considered indecent and lascivious to show a woman making tiny garments. Once censorship is let loose, nothing is safe from the smirch of its exceeding dirtiness.

A case of sorts can be made out for censorship in any field, if you can imagine the job being administered by the wisest man in the world, or one of his five or six closest rivals. But no wise man would ever accept such a post. As things are constituted, it is pretty safe to assume that any given censor is a fool. The very fact that he is a censor indicates that.

H. B.

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